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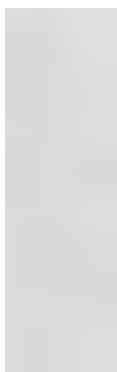












THE
Metropolitan Tabernacle
Pulpit.

SERMONS PREACHED AND REVISED

BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

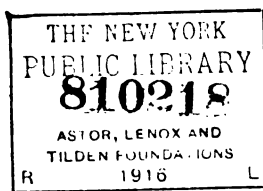
DURING THE YEAR 1877.

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WIDEN
WIDEN
WIDEN

TO
THE ONE GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH
IN
THE TRINITY OF HIS SACRED PERSONS,
BE ALL HONOUR AND GLORY
WORLD WITHOUT END,
AMEN.

TO THE GLORIOUS FATHER, AS THE COVENANT GOD
OF ISRAEL;

TO THE GRACIOUS SON, THE REDEEMER OF HIS PEOPLE;

TO THE HOLY GHOST THE AUTHOR OF
SANCTIFICATION;

BE EVERLASTING PRAISE FOR THAT GOSPEL OF THE
FREE GRACE OF GOD,
HEREIN PROCLAIMED UNTO MEN.

WOMEN
WOMEN
WOMEN

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

✓ THE TWO "COMES."

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 31ST, 1876, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."—Revelation xxii. 17.

OUR text stands at the end of the Book even as this day stands at the end of the year: and it is full of gospel even as we would make our closing Sabbath discourse. It would seem as if the Holy Spirit were loath to put down the pen while so many remained unbelieving, notwithstanding the testimony of the inspired word, and therefore ere he closes the canon of Holy Scripture and guards it against all addition or mutilation with most solemn words, he gives one more full, free, earnest, gracious invitation to thirsty souls to come to Christ and drink. So on this last page of the year I would fain write another gospel invitation that those who have not hitherto believed our report may, even on this last day of the feast, incline their ear and accept the message of salvation. Ere yet the midnight bell proclaims the birth of a new year, may you be born to God: at any rate once more shall the truth by which men are regenerated be lovingly brought under your attention. I ask those of you who have the Master's ear to put up this request to him just now, that if the arrows have missed the mark on the previous fifty-two Sabbaths they may strike the target this time, being directed by the divine Spirit. Pray also that if some have kept the door of their hearts fast closed against the Lord Jesus till now, he may himself come in the preaching of the Word this morning, and put in his hand by the hole of the door, that their hearts may be moved for him. In answer to that prayer we shall be sure to get a blessing. Let us expect it and act upon the expectation, and we shall see men flying to Jesus as a cloud, and as doves to their windows.

Are not the words of our text the words of the Lord Jesus? Can they be regarded as the words of John? I think not, for they follow so closely upon the undoubted language of Jesus in the former verse. Thus runs the passage:—"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto No. 1,331.

you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." We can hardly, I think, divide the paragraph, and we must, it seems to me, regard our text as the words of the risen Jesus, that morning star whose cheering beams foretel the glorious day. The lover of men's souls had not quite done speaking to sinners; there was a little more to say, and here he says it. The divine Redeemer, leaning from his throne whereon he sits as the reward of his accomplished work, and bending over sinners with the same love which led him to die for them says, "Let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Looking at the words, therefore, in that golden light as coming from the dear lips of the Well-beloved, let us notice first, *the heavenward cry of prayer*—"The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come." These voices go upward to Christ. Then, secondly, let us hear *the earthward cry of invitation*—"Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"; that cry goes outward and downward towards needy and sorrowing spirits. Then, thirdly, we shall pause awhile to notice *the relation between these two cries*; for the coming of Christ is connected with the coming of sinners: and then, as best we can, we shall *observe and expect the response to the two cries*; both from him who sitteth in the heavens and from souls thirsting here below. O divine Spirit, bless thou the Word.

I. First, then, our text begins with **THE HEAVENWARD CRY OF PRAYER**, "*The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come.*" I think it will be evident, if you read carefully, that this cannot be interpreted as being only the voice of the Spirit and the bride *to the sinner*. Surely the sense requires us to regard this cry of "come" as addressed to our Lord Jesus, who in a previous verse had been saying, "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me." We may see the second included in it, but it will never do to exclude the first. We shall not have dealt honestly with the words before us unless we regard them first as spoken upwards towards our Lord, whose coming is our great hope.

The matter of this cry is first to be noticed—it is the coming of Christ. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." This is and always has been the universal cry of the church of Jesus Christ. There is no one common theory about the exact meaning of that coming, but there is one common desire for it, in some form or other. Some of us are expecting the bodily coming, because the angel said when the cloud concealed the rising Christ, "This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." We therefore look for his descent upon the earth in person, to be here literally among us. Some expect that when he comes it will be to reign upon the earth, making all things new and bringing to his people a glorious period of a thousand years, in which there shall be perpetual Sabbath rest. Others think that when he cometh he will come to judge the world, and that the day of his appearing is rather to be regarded as the end of all things and the conclusion of this dispensation than as the commencement of the age of gold. There are some

who think the millennium all a dream, and the coming of Christ in person to be a mere fancy, but they believe that he will come spiritually, and they are looking for a time when the gospel shall spread very wonderfully, and there will be an extraordinary power about the ministrations of the word, so that nations shall run unto him and be converted to his truth. Now it would be very interesting to take up these various statements and speculations, but we do not want to do so, because after all, in whatever way men look at it, all the true people of God still desire the coming of Christ, and so long as he draws near they are content. They may have more or less light about the manner of it, but still the coming of Christ has been ever since the time when he departed the great wish and desire, yea and the agonizing prayer of the church of God. "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus," is the cry of the whole host of the Lord's elect. It is true that some have not always desired this coming from motives of the most commendable kind, and many become more than ever earnest in this prayer when they have been in a state of disappointment and sorrow, but still that which they desire is a right thing, and a promised blessing to be given in its time. I suppose the file of sorrow will always give a keener edge to the desire of Christ's coming. Luther on one occasion, when much discouraged, said, "May the Lord come at once! Let him cut the whole matter short with the day of judgment; for there is no amendment to be expected." When we get into this state of mind the desire, though right in appearance, may not be quite as pure as we think. Desires and prayers which grow out of unbelief and petulance can hardly be of the very best order. Perhaps when we more patiently wait and quietly hope, we may not be quite so feverishly anxious for the speedy coming, and yet our state of mind may be more sober and more truly watchful and acceptable than when we showed more apparent eagerness. Waiting must sit side by side with desiring: patience must blend with hope. The Lord's "quickly" may not be my "quickly"; and if so, let him do what seemeth him good. It may be a better thing after all for our Lord to tarry a little longer, that so by a more lengthened conflict he may the better manifest the patience of the saints and the power of the eternal Spirit. It may be the Lord may linger yet a while, and if so, while the church desires his speedy advent, she will not quarrel with her Master, nor dictate to him, nor even wish to know the times and the seasons. "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," is her heart's inmost wish, but as for the details of his coming she leaves them in his hands.

Having noted the matter of the cry, let us next observe *the persons crying*. The Spirit is first mentioned—"The Spirit and the bride say, Come." And why does the Holy Ghost desire the coming of the Lord Jesus? At present the Spirit is, so to speak, the vicegerent of this dispensation upon earth. Our Lord Jesus is gone into the heavens, for it was expedient for him to go, but the Comforter whom the Father hath sent in his name hath taken his place as our teacher, and abides on earth continually as the witness to the truth, and the worker for it in the minds of men. But the Spirit of God is daily grieved during this season of long-suffering and conflict. How much he is provoked all the world over it is not possible for us to know! The forty years in

the wilderness must have become as nothing compared with nineteen centuries of rebellious generations. The ungodly vex him, they reject his testimony, and resist his operations. And, alas, the saints grieve him too. You and I have, I fear, grieved him often during the past year; and so he desireth the end of this evil estate, and saith to our Lord Jesus, "Come." Beside, the Spirit's great object and desire is to glorify Christ, even as our Lord saith, "He shall glorify me, for he shall take of mine and shew them unto you." Now, as the coming of Christ will be the full manifestation of the Redeemer's glory, the Spirit therefore desireth that he may come and take to himself his great power, and reign. The Holy Spirit seals us "unto the day of redemption," having ever an eye to that great event; his work tendeth towards its completion in the day of the appearing of the sons of God. He "is the earnest of our inheritance till the redemption of the purchased possession." Therefore doth the Spirit have sympathy in the groanings of his saints for the glorious appearing, and it is in this connection especially that he is described as helping our infirmities, and making intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. In this sense the Spirit saith "Come"; indeed, all such cries of "Come" in this world are of his prompting.

Our text next tells us that, "the bride saith, Come." We all know that the bride is the church, but perhaps we have not noticed the peculiarity of her name. It is not "The Spirit and *the church* say, Come," but "the Spirit and the bride," for she saith "Come" always more fervently when she realizes her near and dear relationship to her Lord, and all that it involves. Now, a bride is one whose marriage is near, either as having just happened or as close at hand. She is far more than merely espoused—either she is married or about to be, although the actual marriage feast may not have been eaten. So is the church very nearly arrived at the grand hour, when it shall be said "the marriage of the Lamb is come and his bride hath made herself ready"; and because of that she is full of joy at the prospect of hearing the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." Who marvelleth that it is so? It would be unnatural if there were no desire on the part of the church to see her beloved Lord and Head. Is it not as it should be when the bride saith "Come"?

I wish to call your attention to the fact that while I have made two of the persons mentioned in the text for the purpose of discoursing upon them in due order, yet they are not divided in the passage before us. It does not say the Spirit saith "come" and the bride saith "come," but "the Spirit and the bride say, Come." That is to say, the Spirit of God speaketh by the church when he crieth "Come," and the church crieth unto Christ for his coming because she is moved thereto of the Holy Spirit. True prayer is always a joint work; the Holy Spirit within us writes acceptable desires upon our hearts and then we present them. The Holy Ghost does not plead apart from our desiring and believing: we must ourselves desire and will and plead and agonize because the Spirit of God worketh in us so to will and to do. We plead with God because we are prompted and guided by his Holy Spirit. Our pleadings, which go up to heaven for the advent of Jesus, are the Holy Ghost crying in the hearts of the blood-bought. The church herself prays in the

Holy Ghost, instantly crying day and night for the fulfilment of the greatest of all the covenant promises.

"Come, Lord, and tarry not ;
Bring the long-look'd-for day ;
Oh, why these years of waiting here,
These ages of delay ?

"Come, for thy saints still wait ;
Daily ascends their sigh ;
The Spirit and the bride say, Come ;
Dost thou not hear the cry ?"

The next clause of the text indicates that each separate believer should breathe the same desire, "Let him that heareth say, Come." Brethren, this will be the index of your belonging to the bride, the token of your sharing in the one Spirit, and being joined unto the one body, if you unite with the Spirit and the bride in saying, "Come." For no ungodly man truly desireth Christ's coming ; but on the contrary he desireth to get away from him, and forget his very existence. To delight in drawing near unto the Lord Jesus Christ is an evidence of our election and calling ; to wish more and more fully to know him and to dwell more near to him is the token of our having been reconciled unto God by his death, and of our having a new nature implanted in us : to long to see him manifested in fulness of glory is the ensign of a true soldier of the cross. Do you feel this ? Do you desire to be better acquainted with the Lord Jesus ? You have heard the gospel, do you say as the church doth, "Come, Lord Jesus" ? Alas, to many the day of the Lord will be darkness and not light, and they cannot desire it, for it will be a day of terror and confusion unto them ; but unto such as have heard and believed in the precious name of the Son of God it will be joy and peace, and therefore the cry of their heart is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

This utterance of "Come" by him that heareth it is the mark of his joyful consent to the fact that Christ shall come. It is well, my friend, if when thou hearest that Christ will come thou sayest, "Let him come." If he come to reign, let him, for blessed be his name, who should reign but he ? If he descend to judge the earth, let him come, for we shall be justified at his bar. His ends and objects in coming cannot but be fraught with infinite benefit to us and glory to our God, and therefore we would not delay his chariot wheels by so much as an hour.

"Hasten, Lord ! the promised hour ;
Come in glory and in power ;
Still thy foes are unsubdued ;
Nature sighs to be renew'd.
Time has nearly reached its sum,
All things with thy bride say 'Come ;'
Jesus, whom all worlds adore,
Come and reign for evermore !"

The saying of "come" by each true hearer is the sign that his heart responds to the doctrine which he has been taught. We have received it by revelation that Christ is to come, and our soul saith, "Even so. Come Lord Jesus ; it is our happiness that it should be so."

Thus have we mentioned the persons by whom this cry is uttered,

and now let us add a word upon *the sense in which the cry is put*. It is in the present tense. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come." The Spirit and the bride are anxious that Christ should come at once, and he that knoweth Christ and loveth him desireth also that he should not tarry. Look, my brethren, is it not time as far as our poor judgments go that Jesus should come? See how iniquity abounds! Behold our very streets, how foul they are with sin! See how errors are multiplied: do they not swarm even in the church of God itself? Have not heresies come down like birds of prey upon the sacrifice, to pollute even the altars of the Most High? See at this present time how sceptics defy the living God, how they hiss out from between their teeth the question, "Where is the promise of his coming, for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were?" Behold how Antichrist also stalks boldly through the land. Superstitions which your fathers could not bear are set up among you yet again, and the graven images, crosses, crucifixes and sacraments, gods many and lords many, of old Rome have come back to England again, and they are worshipped in her national church. In England, stained with the blood of martyrs, once again the mark of the beast is to be seen on the foreheads of those whom she feeds to teach her people! Is it not time that the Lord should come? O hoary systems of superstition, what else can shake ye from your thrones! O gods that have long ruled over superstitious minds, who else can hurl you to the moles and to the bats? Ye know him who made you quiver on your thrones on that night when he was born in Bethlehem's manger, and ye may well tremble, for when he cometh it will be with an iron rod to dash you into shivers. "Even so," we cry, "come, Lord Jesus: come quickly. Amen."

II. Now, secondly, let us listen to THE EARTHWARD CRY OF INVITATION TO MEN. I must confess I cannot quite tell you how it is that the sense in my text glides away from the coming of Christ to the earth into the coming of sinners to Christ, but it does. Like colours which blend, or strains of music which melt into each other, so the first sense slides into the second. This almost insensible transition seems to me to have been occasioned by the memory of the fact that the coming of Christ is not desirable to all mankind. There are the unbelievers who have not obeyed him, and when they hear the Spirit and the bride say come, straightway they begin to tremble, and they say within themselves, "What if he should come! Alas, we rejected him, and his coming will be our destruction." •I think I hear some such sinners weeping and wailing at the very thought of the Lord's coming, for they know that they also who have pierced him must behold him and weep because of him. It seems almost cruel on the part of the bride and the Spirit to be saying come, when that coming must be for the overthrow of all the adversaries of the Lord: and so Jesus himself seems gently to turn aside the prayer of his people while he pleads with the needy ones. He lets the prayer flow towards himself, but yet directs its flow towards poor sinners also. He himself seems to say, "Ye bid me come, but I, as the Saviour of men, look at your brothers and your sisters who are yet in the far country, the other sheep which are not yet of the fold, whom I must bring in, and in answer to your cry to me to come I speak

to those wandering ones, and say, 'Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' Is not that the way in which the sense glides from its first direction?

Now, *from whom does this cry arise?*

It first comes *from Jesus*. It is he who says, "Let him that is athirst come." The passage so stands, as I have already said, that we cannot but believe this verse to have been the utterance of Him who is the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. He out of heaven cries to the unconverted, "Let him that is athirst come." Will they refuse him that speaketh? Shall Jesus himself invite them, and will they turn a deaf ear?

But next, it is the call of *the Spirit of God*. The Spirit says, "Come." This Book which he has written, on every page says to men, "Come! Come to Jesus." This is the cry of the Spirit in the preaching of the word. What mean sermons and discourses but "Come sinner, come?" And those secret motions of power upon the conscience, those times when the heart grows calm even amid dissipation, and thought is forced upon the mind, those are the movements of the Spirit of God by which he is showing man his danger and revealing to him his refuge, and so is saying, "Come." All over the world wherever there is a Bible and a preacher the Spirit is saying "Come."

And this is the speech of *the church* too in conjunction with the Spirit, for the Spirit speaks with the bride and the bride speaks by the Spirit. The church is always saying "Come." This is indeed the meaning of her Sabbath gatherings, of her testimony in the pulpit, of her teaching in the schools, of her prayers and her exhortations. Everywhere, poor wandering hearts, the church of God is saying to you, "Come"; or if she does not do so she is not acting in her true character as the bride of Christ. For this purpose is there a church in the world at all; if it were not for this our Lord might take his people home as soon as they have believed, but they are kept here to be a seed to keep the truth alive in the world, and their daily earnest cry to you is "Come, come to Jesus." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come."

The next giver of the invitation is spoken of as "*him that heareth*." If you have had an ear to hear, and have heard the gospel to your own salvation, the very next thing you have to do is to say to those around you, "Come." Go and speak to anybody that you meet, to everybody that you meet, according as opportunity and occasion shall be given you, and say what all the church saith and what the Spirit is saying—namely, "Come." Give your Master's invitation, distribute the testimony of his loving will, and bid poor sinners come to Jesus. Your children and your servants,—bid them come; your neighbours and your friends,—bid them come; the strangers and the far-off ones,—bid them come; the harlot and the thief,—bid such come; those that are in the highways and the hedges, those who are far-off from God by abominable works—say also unto all these "Come." Because you have heard the message and proved its truth, go you and call in others to the feast of love. Oh, if there were more of these individual proclaimers what blessings would descend upon London! I do not know how many believers in Christ there are present in this house, but I do know that there are five thousand of us associated in church fellowship

at this Tabernacle; and if the whole of these five thousand would but begin to bear witness for Christ with all their might, there would be salt enough even within this one house to season all London, with God's blessing upon our efforts. My brothers and sisters, let us not be slow to address ourselves to those to whom the Spirit of God within us, and the voice of Jesus from above, and the cry of the whole church is addressed. Let each individual member take up the note of invitation till all around the trembling sinner hears the encouraging cry of "Come."

Now, notice *the remarkably encouraging character of this "Come,"* which is given by the Spirit and the bride. One part of it is directed to the thirsty: "Let him that is athirst come." By thirst is meant necessity, and an appetite for its supply. Dost thou feel thyself guilty, and dost thou desire pardon?—thou art a thirsty one. Art thou disquieted and filled with unrest, and dost thou long to be pacified in heart?—thou art a thirsty one. Is there a something, thou knowest not perhaps what it is, for which thou art sighing, and crying, and pining?—thou art a thirsty one, and to thee is the invitation most positively and distinctly given, "Let him that is athirst come."

But how much I rejoice that the second half of the invitation does not contain even an apparent limit, as this first sentence has been thought to do! I regard the thirst here mentioned as by no means requiring of any man that he should have gone through a process of horror on account of guilt, or should have been overwhelmed with conviction, and driven to despair of salvation. I believe that any desire and any longing will come under the description, of "thirst"; but since some have stumbled at it, and have said again and again, "I feel I do not thirst enough," see how sweetly the second clause of our text puts it—"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Whether thou be thirsty or not, yet hast thou a will to drink? hast thou a will to be saved? a will to be cleansed from sin? a will to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus? Dost thou will to have eternal life? Then thus saith the Spirit to thee, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Now, notice three vast doors through which the hugest and most elephantine sinner that ever made the earth shake beneath the weight of his guilt may go. Here are the three doors. "*Whosoever*"—"will"—"*freely*." "*Whosoever*," there is the first door. "*Whosoever*"—then what man dare have the impudence to say that he is shut out? If you say that you cannot come in under "*whosoever*," I ask you how you dare narrow a word which is in itself so broad, so infinite. "*Whosoever*"—that must mean every man that ever lived, or ever shall live, while yet he is here and wills to come. Well, then, the word "*will*." There is nothing about past character, nor present character; nothing about knowledge, or feeling, nor anything else but the will: "*Whosoever will*." Speak of the gate standing ajar! This looks to me like taking the door right off the hinges and carrying it away. "*Whosoever will*." There is no hindrance whatever in your way. And then "*freely*." God's gifts are given without any expectation or recompense, or any requirements and conditions—"Let him take the water of life freely." Thou hast not to bring thy good feelings, or good desires, or good works, but come and take freely what God gives you for

nothing. You are not even to bring repentance and faith in order to obtain grace, but you are to come and accept repentance and faith as the gifts of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit. What broad gates of mercy these are! How wide the entrance which love has prepared for coming souls! "*Whosoever!*" "*Will!*" "*Freely!*"

Observe how the invitation sums up the work the sinner is called upon to do. First, he is bidden to *come*. "*Whosoever will, let him come.*" Now, to come to Christ means simply for the soul to draw near to him by trusting him. You are not asked to bring a load with you, nor to work for Christ in order to salvation, but just to come to him. Nothing is said about the style of coming, come running or creeping, come boldly or timidly, for if you do but come to Jesus, he will in no wise cast you out. A simple reliance upon the Lord Jesus is the one essential for eternal life.

Then the next direction is "*take.*" "*Whosoever will, let him take.*" That is all. That word "*take*" is a grand word to express the gospel. The world's gospel is "*bring*": Christ's gospel is "*take.*" Nature's gospel is "*make*": just change the letter and you have the gospel of grace which is "*take.*" There is the water, dear friends, you have not to dig a well to find it, you have only to take it. There is the bread of heaven, you have not to grind the flour or bake the loaf, you have only to take it. There is a garment woven from the top throughout, and without seam; you have not to add a fringe to it, you have only to take it. The way of salvation may be summed up in the four letters of the word "*take.*" Do you desire Christ? take him. Do you want pardon? take it. Do you need a new heart? take it. Do you want peace on earth? take it. Do you want heaven hereafter? take it—that is all. "*Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*"

And there is one other word which I love to dwell on, and it comes twice over "*let him*" that is athirst come, and whosoever will *let him take.*" It is graciously said, *let him*. It seems to me as if the Lord Jesus Christ saw a poor soul standing thirsty at the flowing crystal fountain of his love, and the devil standing there whispered to him, "*You see the sacred stream, but it flows for others. It is what you need, but you must not have it, it is not for you.*" Listen, there is a voice from beyond the clouds which cries aloud, "*Let him take it!*" Stand back devil, let the willing one come! He is putting down his lip to drink—he understands it now—but there comes rushing upon him a host of his old sins like so many winged harpies, and they scream out to him, "*Go back, you must not draw nigh, this fountain is not for you: this pure crystal stream must not be defiled by such leprous lips as yours.*" Again there comes from the throne of love this blessed password, "*Let him come and let him take.*" It is as when a man is in court and is called for, to go into the witness-box. He is standing in the crowd, and his name is called: what happens? As soon as he hears his name he begins to push through the throng to reach his place. "*What are you at?*" says one. "*I am called,*" says he. "*Stand back; why do you push so?*" says another. "*I am called by the judge,*" says he. A big policeman demands, "*Why are you making such confusion in court?*" "*But,*" says the man, "*I am called. My name was called out, and I must come.*" If he cannot come, if it is

not possible for him to get through the throng, one of the authorities calls out, "Make way for that man—he is summoned by the court. Officers, clear a passage and let him come." Now the Lord Jesus calls the thirsty-one and he says, "Whosoever will, let him come!" Make way doubts, make way sins, make way fears, make way devils, make way all of you for Jesus Christ the great king and judge of all has said, "Let him come!" Who shall hinder when Jesus permits? He who is divinely called shall surely come to Jesus. Come he shall, whoever may stand in his way. This morning I feel as if I could come to Jesus over again, and I will do so. Do you not feel the same, my beloved brethren? Well then, dear brother or sister, after you have so done turn round and proclaim this precious gospel invitation to all around you, and say to them "Come and take the water of life freely."

III.—The third point is THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THESE TWO COMINGS. Is there any relation between the coming of Christ from heaven to earth, and the coming of poor sinful creatures to Christ and trusting him?

There is this relation, first, they are both suggested in this passage, by the closing of the scriptural canon. John is about to write by the voice of the Lord that none are to add to or take from the completed Book of God. The church says, "If there are no more prophets to proclaim the mind of God, no more apostles to write with infallible authority, and no more instructors to give forth new revelations, or bring new promises, then it only remaineth that the Lord should come. "Then," says she, "Come, Lord Jesus." And here are the sinners standing round, and they hear that no other gospel is to be expected, no more revelations are to be added to those which are in this book, there will be no other atonement, no other way of salvation, therefore it is their wisdom to come at once to Jesus. It is because the Book was about to receive its *finis* that the Spirit and the bride unitedly cried to the sinners to come at once. No fresh gospel is to be expected, therefore let them come at once. Why should they tarry any longer? The oxen and fatlings are killed, come to the supper! All things are ready, there is nothing more to be done, or to be revealed; upon us the ends of the earth have come. "It is finished" hath rung through earth and heaven, therefore—

"Come and welcome, sinner come!"

I think I perceive another connection, namely, that those people who in very truth love Christ enough to cry to him continually to come are sure to love sinners also, and to say to them also, "Come." Not but what there are some who talk a great deal about Christ's coming, and yet manifest but small care for other men's souls. Well, it is talk; the profession of looking for the second advent is nothing but talk when it does not lead people to cry to perishing men, "Come to Christ." He who loves Christ as he should loves sinners also; and that man who loves Christ so very much that he is quite wrapped up in himself, and forgets the dying millions around him, and stands star-gazing into heaven, expecting to see a sudden glory, to take himself away, does not understand what he saith: for if he loved his Lord he would set to

work for him, and would show that he expected the King to come by endeavouring to extend his kingdom.

There is this connection also, that before Christ comes a certain number of his elect must be ingathered. He shall not come until an appointed company shall have been brought to eternal life by the preaching of the Word. Oh then, brethren, it is ours to labour that the wanderers may come home, for so we are, as far as lieth in us, hastening the time when our Beloved himself shall come.

Once more, there is a sort of coming of Christ which, though it be not the first meaning here, may be included in it, for it touches the centre of the sinner's coming to Christ. Because, brethren, when we cry, "Come, Lord Jesus," if he shall answer us by giving us of his Spirit more fully, so that he comes to us spiritually, then penitent souls will assuredly be brought to his feet. We know this, that wherever the Lord himself is in a meeting, hearts are sure to be broken and repentance is certain to be manifested. Wherever Jesus Christ is in power there must be a revival, for dead souls must come to life in him. The great thing we want above all others is a grip of that glorious promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," and as we in this sense obtain the coming of the Lord, we shall see sinners come and take of the water of life.

IV. Well then, lastly, WHAT ARE THE RESPONSES? We sent up a cry to heaven, and said, "Come." The response is, "Behold, I come quickly." That is eminently satisfactory. You may have to wait awhile, but the cry is heard, and if the Lord should not come in your lifetime, the same preparation of heart which made you look for his coming will be blessedly useful to you if he sends his messenger to take you home by death. The same waiting and watching will answer in either case, so you need not be under any distress about which of the two shall happen. Christ will descend to earth as surely as he ascended to heaven, and when he cometh there will be victory to the right and to the true, and his saints shall reign with him.

And now concerning this other cry of "Come." We ask sinners to come. We have asked them in a fourfold voice: Jesus, the Spirit, the bride, and him that heareth, they have all said, "Come." Will they come? Brethren and sisters, it is a question which I cannot answer. You must not ask *me*, for I do not know; but you had better ask the persons themselves: they are of age, ask *them*. Take care that you do ask them before they get out of the Tabernacle this morning. They know, and therefore they can tell you whether they mean to come or not. This I will say to them,—my dear friends, I do trust that this last day of the year may be to you a day of mercy. The Jews had a feast of ingatherings at the end of the year, and I earnestly pray that we may have an ingathering of precious souls to Christ ere the year quite runs out: that would be a grand finish to this year of grace, and a sweet encouragement for the future.

But suppose you do not come. Well, you have been invited. If a Christmas feast is provided for the poor, and a number of beggars are standing shivering outside in the sleet and snow, and will not come in though earnestly bidden, we say "Well, you have been invited: what more do you want?" Remember, also, that you have been invited very

earnestly. The Spirit, the bride, and him that heareth, and Jes himself,—they have all said to you "Come." I am as the man th heareth, and I have said, "Come." I do not know how to say it mor earnestly than I have said it. Oh, how would my soul delight if ever one here did come to Christ at this moment! I would ask no grea joy out of heaven to crown this year with. You are invited, and yo are earnestly invited, what more do you want? If you never come you will have this thought to haunt you for ever—"I was invited an pressed again and again, but I would not come."

I want you to remember, too, that you are called to come now, a once. You may not be bidden to come to-morrow for several reasons you may not be alive, or there may be no earnest person near you t invite you. Can there be a better day than to-day? You have alway said "To-morrow," yet where are you now? Not a bit forwarder som of you than you were ten years ago. Do you recollect that sermon whe you were made to tremble so, and you said, "Please God, I get out o this, I will seek his face," but you postponed it, and are you any for warder now? You remember the story of the countryman who woul not cross the river just yet, but sat down and said he would wait unt all the water had gone by. He waited long in vain, and he might hav waited for ever, for rivers are always flowing. You too are waiting til a more convenient season shall come, and all the difficulties shall hav gone by. Be quit of such supreme folly. There always will be diffi culty, the river will always flow. O man, be wise, plunge into it an swim across. Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salva tion. Oh that you would believe in Jesus Christ! May his Spiri lead you to do so now.

"Only trust him! only trust him!
Only trust him *now*!
He will save you! he will save you!
He will save you *now*!"

Cast yourselves upon the blood and merits of the Lord Jesus, and th great work is done. The Lord help you to do so. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation xxii.

HYMN FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—917, 345, 509.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OUR URGENT NEED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 7TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Through the power of the Holy Ghost."—Rom. xv. 13.

"By the power of the Spirit of God."—Rom. xv. 19.

I DESIRE to draw your attention at this time to the great necessity which exists for the continual manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the church of God if by her means the multitudes are to be gathered to the Lord Jesus. I did not know how I could much better do so than by first showing that the Spirit of God is necessary to the church of God for its own internal growth in grace. Hence my text in the thirteenth verse, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost,"—where it is evident that the apostle attributes the power to be filled with joy and peace in believing, and the power to abound in hope, to the Holy Ghost. But, then, I wanted also to show you that the power of the church outside, that with which she is to be aggressive and work upon the world for the gathering out of God's elect from among men, is also this same energy of the Holy Spirit. Hence I have taken the nineteenth verse, for the apostle there says that God had through him made "the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God." So you see, dear friends, that first of all to keep the church happy and holy within herself there must be a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit, and secondly, that the church may invade the territories of the enemy and may conquer the world for Christ she must be clothed with the self-same sacred energy. We may then go further and say that the power of the church for external work will be proportionate to the power which dwells within herself. Gauge the energy of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers and you may fairly calculate their influence upon unbelievers. Only let the church be illuminated by the Holy Spirit and she will reflect the light and become to onlookers "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

No. 1,332.

Let us by two or three illustrations show that the work outward must always depend upon the force inward. On a cold winter's day when the snow has fallen and lies deep upon the ground you go through a village. There is a row of cottages, and you will notice that from one of the roofs the snow has nearly disappeared, while another cottage still bears a coating of snow. You do not stay to make enquiries as to the reason of the difference, for you know very well what is the cause. There is a fire burning inside the one cottage and the warmth glows through its roof, and so the snow speedily melts: in the other there is no tenant; it is a house to let, no fire burns on its hearth and no warm smoke ascends the chimney, and therefore there lies the snow. Just as the warmth is within so the melting will be without. I look at a number of churches, and where I see worldliness and formalism lying thick upon them, I am absolutely certain that there is not the warmth of Christian life within; but where the hearts of believers are warm with divine love through the Spirit of God, we are sure to see evils vanish, and beneficial consequences following therefrom. We need not look within; in such a case the exterior is index sufficient.

Take an illustration from political life. Here is a trouble arising between different nations; there are angry spirits stirring, and it seems very likely that the Gordian knot of difficulty will never be untied by diplomacy, but will need to be cut with the sword. Everybody knows that one of the hopes of peace lies in the bankrupt condition of the nation which is likely to go to war; for if it be short of supplies, if it cannot pay its debts, if it cannot furnish the material for war, then it will not be likely to court a conflict. A country must be strong in internal resources before it can wisely venture upon foreign wars. Thus is it in the great battle of truth: a poor starveling church cannot combat the devil and his armies. Unless the church is herself rich in the things of God, and strong with divine energy, she will generally cease to be aggressive, and will content herself with going on with the regular routine of Christian work, crying, "Peace! peace!" where peace should not be. She will not dare to defy the world, or to send forth her legions to conquer its provinces for Christ, when her own condition is pitifully weak. The strength or weakness of a nation's exchequer affects its army in its every march, and in like manner its measure of grace influences the church of God in all its action.

Suffer yet another illustration. If you lived in Egypt, you would notice, once in the year, the Nile rising; and you would watch its increase with anxiety, because the extent of the overflow of the Nile is very much the measure of the fertility of Egypt. Now the rising of the Nile must depend upon those far-off lakes in the centre of Africa—whether they shall be well filled with the melting of the snows or no. If there be a scanty supply in the higher reservoirs, there cannot be much overflow in the Nile in its after-course through Egypt. Let us translate the figure, and say that, if the upper lakes of fellowship with God in the Christian Church are not well filled—if the soul's spiritual strength be not sustained by private prayer and communion with God—the Nile of practical Christian service will never rise to the flood.

The one thing I want to say is this: you cannot get out of the Church what is not in it. The reservoir itself must be filled before it

can pour forth a stream. We must ourselves drink of the living water till we are full, and then out of the midst of us shall flow rivers of living water ; but not till then. Out of an empty basket you cannot distribute loaves and fishes, however hungry the crowd may be. Out of an empty heart you cannot speak full things, nor from a lean soul bring forth fat things full of marrow, which shall feed the people of God. Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh, when it speaks to edification at all. So that the first thing is to look well to home affairs, and pray that God would bless *us* and cause his face to shine upon *us*, that his way may be known upon earth, and his saving health among all people.

“ To bless thy chosen race,
In mercy, Lord, incline,
And cause the brightness of thy face
On all thy saints to shine.

“ That so thy wondrous way
May through the world be known ;
Whilst distant lands their tribute pay,
And thy salvation own.”

This morning, in trying to speak of the great necessity of the Church, namely, her being moved vigorously by the power of the Holy Spirit, I earnestly pray that we may enter upon this subject with the deepest conceivable reverence. Let us adore while we are meditating ; let us feel the condescension of this blessed Person of the Godhead in deigning to dwell in his people and to work in the human heart. Let us remember that this divine person is very sensitive. He is a jealous God. We read of his being grieved and vexed, and therefore let us ask his forgiveness of the many provocations which he must have received from our hands. With lowliest awe let us bow before him, remembering that, if there be a sin which is unpardonable, it has a reference to himself—the sin against the Holy Ghost, which shall never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in that which is to come. In reference to the Holy Ghost we stand on very tender ground indeed ; and if ever we should veil our faces and rejoice with trembling, it is while we speak of the Spirit, and of those mysterious works with which he blesses us. In that lowly spirit, and under the divine overshadowing follow me while I set before you seven works of the Holy Spirit which are most necessary to the Church for its own good, and equally needful to her in her office of missionary from Christ to the outside world.

I. To begin, then, the power of the Holy Ghost is manifested in the QUICKENING of souls to spiritual life. All the spiritual life which exists in this world is the creation of the Holy Spirit, by whom the Lord Jesus quickeneth whomsoever he will. You and I had not life enough to know our death till he visited us, we had not light enough to perceive that we were in darkness, nor sense enough to feel our misery : we were so utterly abandoned to our own folly that, though we were naked, and poor, and miserable, we dreamed that we were rich, and increased in goods. We were under sentence of death as condemned criminals, and yet we talked about merit and reward ; yea, we were dead, and yet we boasted that we were alive—counting our very death to be our life. The Spirit of God in infinite mercy came to us with his

mysterious power, and made us live. The first token of life was a consciousness of our being in the realm of death, and an agony to escape from it ; we began to perceive our insensibility, and, if I may be pardoned such an expression, we saw our blindness. Every growth of spiritual life, from the first tender shoot until now, has also been the work of the Holy Spirit. As the green blade was his production, so is the ripening corn. The increase of life, as much as life at the beginning, must still come by the operation of the Spirit of God, who raised up Christ from the dead. You will never have more life, brother, except as the Holy Ghost bestows it upon you ; yea, you will not even know that you want more, nor groan after more, except as he worketh in you to desire and to agonise, according to his own good pleasure. See, then, our absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit ; for if he were gone we should relapse into spiritual death, and the Church would become a charnel-house.

The Holy Spirit is absolutely needful to make everything that we do to be alive. We are sowers, brethren, but if we take dead seed in our seed-basket there will never be a harvest. The preacher must preach living truth in a living manner if he expects to obtain a hundred-fold harvest. How much there is of church work which is nothing better than the movement of a galvanized corpse. How much of religion is done as if it were performed by an automaton, or ground off by machinery. Now-a-days men care little about heart and soul, they only look at outward performances. Why, I hear they have now invented a machine which talks, though surely there was talk enough without this Parisian addition to the band of prattlers. We can preach as machines, we can pray as machines, and we can teach Sunday-school as machines. Men can give mechanically, and come to the communion-table mechanically : yes, and we ourselves shall do so unless the Spirit of God be with us. Most hearers know what it is to hear a live sermon which quivers all over with fulness of energy ; you also know what it is to sing a hymn in a lively manner, and you know what it is to unite in a live prayer-meeting ; but, ah, if the Spirit of God be absent, all that the church does will be lifeless, the rustle of leaves above a tomb, the gliding of spectres, the congregation of the dead turning over in their graves.

As the Spirit of God is a quickener to make us alive and our work alive, so must he specially be with us to make those alive with whom we have to deal for Jesus. Imagine a dead preacher preaching a dead sermon to dead sinners : what can possibly come of it ? Here is a beautiful essay which has been admirably elaborated, and it is coldly read to the cold-hearted sinner. It smells of the midnight oil, but it has no heavenly unction, no divine power resting upon it, nor, perhaps, is that power even looked for. What good can come of such a production ? As well may you try to calm the tempest with poetry or stay the hurricane with rhetoric as to bless a soul by mere learning and eloquence. It is only as the Spirit of God shall come upon God's servant and shall make the word which he preaches to drop as a living seed into the heart that any result can follow his ministry ; and it is only as the Spirit of God shall then follow that seed and keep it alive in the soul of the listener that we can expect those who profess to be converted to take root and grow to maturity of grace, and become our sheaves at the last.

We are utterly dependent here, and for my part I rejoice in this absolute dependence. If I could have a stock of power to save souls which would be all my own apart from the Spirit of God, I cannot suppose a greater temptation to pride and to living at a distance from God. It is well to be weak in self, and better still to be nothing : to be simply the pen in the hand of the Spirit of God, unable to write a single letter upon the tablets of the human heart except as the hand of the Holy Spirit shall use us for that purpose. That is really our position, and we ought practically to take it up ; and doing so we shall continually cry to the Spirit of God to quicken us in all things, and quicken all that we do, and quicken the word as it drops into the sinner's ear. I am quite certain that a church which is devoid of life cannot be the means of life-giving to the dead sinners around it. No. Everything acts after its kind, and we must have a living church for living work. O that God would quicken every member of this church ! "What," say you, "do you think some of us are not alive unto God ?" Brethren, there are some of you concerning whom I am certain, as far as one can judge of another, that you have life, for we can see it in all that you do ; but there are some others of you concerning whose spiritual life one has to exercise a good deal of faith and a great deal more charity, for we do not perceive in you much activity in God's cause, nor care for the souls of others, nor zeal for the divine glory. If we do not see any fruits, what can we do but earnestly pray that you may not turn out to be barren trees ?

That is the first point, and we think it is as clear as possible that we must have the quickening power of the Spirit for ourselves if we are to be the means in the hand of God of awakening dead souls.

II. Next it is one of the peculiar offices of the Holy Spirit to ENLIGHTEN his people. He has done so by giving us his Word, which he has inspired ; but the Book, inspired though it be, is never spiritually understood by any man apart from the personal teaching of its great Author. You may read it as much as you will, and never discover the inner and vital sense unless your soul shall be led into it by the Holy Ghost himself. "What," saith one, "I have learned the shorter catechism and I have got the creed by heart, and yet do I know nothing ?" I answer, you have done well to learn the letter of truth, but you still need the Spirit of God to make it the light and power of God to your soul. The letter you may know, and know it better than some who know also the spirit, and I do not for a moment depreciate a knowledge of the letter, unless you suppose that there is something saving in mere head knowledge ; but the Spirit of God must come, and makes the letter alive to you, transfer it to your heart, set it on fire and make it burn within you, or else its divine force and majesty will be hid from your eyes. No man knows the things of God save he to whom the Spirit of God has revealed them. No carnal mind can understand spiritual things. We may use language as plain as a pikestaff, but the man who has no spiritual understanding is a blind man, and the clearest light will not enable him to see. Ye must be taught of the Lord, or you will die in ignorance. Now, my brethren, suppose that in a church there should be many who have never been thus instructed, can you not see that evil must and will come of it ? Error is sure to arise where truth is not

experimentally known. If professors be not taught of the Spirit their ignorance will breed conceit, pride, unbelief, and a thousand other evils. Oh, hadst thou known more of truth, my brother, thou hadst not boasted so ! Oh, hadst thou seen that truth which as yet has not been revealed to thee because of thy prejudice, thou hadst not so fiercely condemned those who are better than thyself ! With much zeal to do good, men have done a world of mischief through want of instruction in divine things. Sorrow too comes of ignorance. O, my brother, hadst thou known the doctrines of grace thou hadst not been so long a time in bondage ! Half of the heresy in the church of God is not wilful error, but error which springs of not knowing the truth, not searching the Scriptures with a teachable heart, not submitting the mind to the light of the Holy Ghost. We should, as a rule, treat heresy rather as ignorance to be enlightened than as crime to be condemned ; save, alas, that sometimes it becomes wilful perversity, when the mind is greedy after novelty, or puffed up with self-confidence : then other treatment may become painfully necessary. Beloved, if the Spirit of God will but enlighten the church thoroughly there will be an end of divisions. Schisms are generally occasioned by ignorance, and the proud spirit which will not brook correction. On the other hand, real, lasting, practical unity will exist in proportion to the unity of men's minds in the truth of God. Hence the necessity for the Spirit of God to conduct us into the whole truth. My dear brother, if you think you know a doctrine, ask the Lord to make you sure that you know it, for much that we think we know turns out to be unknown when times of trial put us to the test. Nothing do we really know unless it be burnt into our souls as with a hot iron by an experience which only the Spirit of God can give.

I think you will now see that, the Spirit of God being thus necessary for our instruction, we pre-eminently find in this gracious operation our strength for the instruction of others ; for how shall those teach who have never been taught ? How shall men declare a message which they have never learned ? " Son of man, eat this roll " ; for until thou hast eaten it thyself thy lips can never tell it out to others. " The husbandman that laboureth must first be a partaker of the fruits." It is the law of Christ's vineyard that none shall work therein till first of all they know the flavour of the fruits which grow in the sacred enclosure. Thou must know Christ, and grace, and love, and truth thyself before thou canst even be an instructor of babes for Christ.

When we come to deal with others, earnestly longing to instruct them for Jesus, we perceive even more clearly our need of the Spirit of God. Ah, my brother, you think you will put the gospel so clearly that they *must* see it ; but their blind eyes overcome you. Ah ! you think you will put it so zealously that they *must* feel it ; but their clay-cold hearts defeat you. Old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon, depend upon that. You may think you are going to win souls by your pleadings, but you might as well stand on the top of a mountain and whistle to the wind, unless the Holy Spirit be with you. After all your talking, your hearers *will*, perhaps, have caught *your* idea, but the mind of the Spirit, the real *soul* of the gospel, you cannot impart to them ; this remains, like creation a work which only God can accomplish. Daily, then, let us pray

power of the Spirit as the Illuminator. Come, O blessed light of God alone canst break our personal darkness, and only when thou hast enlightened us can we lead others in thy light. An ignorant man is disqualified for great usefulness ; but he who is taught of God to teach transgressors God's ways, and sinners shall be converted to Christ. Both to burn within and shine without you must have the indwelling Spirit.

One work of the Spirit of God is to create in believers the spirit of ADOPTION. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, whereby ye cry, Abba, Father !" "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father !" We are created by the Holy Spirit, and so receive the nature of children ; the Father, whose nature, which is given by him, he continually prompts, and nurtures and develops, and matures ; so that we receive day by day more of the child-like spirit. Now, beloved, this may not seem to be of very great importance at first sight ; but it is so ; for we are never happy except as all her members walk as dear children towards God. Sometimes the spirit of slaves creeps over us : we talk of the service of God as though it were heavy and burdensome ; we are discontented if we do not receive present wages and visible tokens as servants do when they are not suited ; but the spirit of adoption works for love, without any hope of reward, and it is satisfied with the sweet fact of being in the Father's house, and doing the Father's will. This spirit gives peace, rest, joy, boldness, and holy love with God. A man who never received the spirit of a child of God does not know the bliss of the Christian life ; he misses its fragrance, its savour, its excellence, and I should not wonder if the service of God should be a weariness to him because he has never yet got to the things, and does not enjoy the green pastures, wherein the Shepherd makes his sheep to feed and to lie down. But when the Father of God makes us feel that we are sons, and we live in the Father's love to go no more out for ever, then the service of God is no longer a task, but a pleasure, and we accept the delay of apparent success as a part of the Father's will which we are called to bear.

Mark you, this will have a great effect upon the outside world. Professors performing religion as a task, groaning along the ways of life with faces full of misery, like slaves who dread the lash, can have but a small effect upon the sinners around them. They say, "These professors are a hard master, and they are denying themselves for nothing ; why should we be like them ?" But bring me a church of children of God, a company of men and women whose faces are like their heavenly Father's smile, who are accustomed to take their Father's will and cast them on their Father as children should, who know they are accepted and beloved, and are perfectly content with the great will ; put them down in the midst of a company of ungodly men and women, and I will warrant you they will begin to envy them their peace.

Thus happy saints become most efficient operators upon the world of the unsaved. O blessed Spirit of God ! let us all now feel that we are the children of the great Father, and let our childlike love be manifest this morning ; so shall we be fit to go forth and proclaim the

Lord's love to the prodigals who are in the far-off land among the swine.

These three points are self-evident, I think. Now pass to a fourth.

IV. The Holy Spirit is especially called the Spirit of HOLINESS. He never suggested sin nor approved of it, nor has he ever done otherwise than grieve over it: but holiness is the Spirit's delight. The church of God wears upon her brow the words, "Holiness to the Lord." Only in proportion as she is holy may she claim to be the church of God at all. An unholy church! Surely this cannot be her of whom we read, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Holiness is not mere morality, not the outward keeping of divine precepts out of a hard sense of duty, while those commandments in themselves are not delightful to us. Holiness is the entirety of our manhood fully consecrated to the Lord and moulded to his will. This is the thing which the church of God must have, but it can never have it apart from the Sanctifier, for there is not a grain of holiness beneath the sky but what is of the operation of the Holy Ghost. And, brethren, if a church be destitute of holiness what effect can it have upon the world? Scoffers utterly condemn and despise professors whose inconsistent lives contradict their verbal testimonies. An unholy church may pant and struggle after dominion, and make what noise she can in pretence of work for Christ, but the kingdom comes not to the unholy, neither have they themselves entered it. The testimony of unholy men is no more acceptable to Christ than was the homage which the evil spirit gave to him in the days of his flesh, to which he answered, "Hold thy peace." "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" The dew is withholden, and the rain cometh not in its season to the tillage of those who profess to be the servants of God and yet sow iniquity. After all, the acts of the church preach more to the world than the words of the church. Put an anointed man to preach the gospel in the midst of a really godly people and his testimony will be marvellously supported by the church with which he labours; but place the most faithful minister over an ungodly church, and he has such a weight upon him that he must first clear himself of it, or he cannot succeed. He may preach his heart out, he may pray till his knees are weary, but conversions will be sorely hindered, if indeed they occur at all. There is no likelihood of victory to Israel while Achan's curse is on the camp. An unholy church makes Christ to say that he cannot do many mighty works there because of its iniquity.

Brethren, do you not see in this point our need of the Spirit of God? And when you get to grappling terms with sinners, and have to talk to them about the necessity of holiness, and a renewed heart, and a godly life coming out of that renewed heart, do you expect ungodly men to be charmed with what you say? What cares the unregenerate mind for righteousness? Was a carnal man ever eager after holiness? Such a thing was never seen. As well expect the devil to be in love with God as an unredeemed heart to be in love with holiness. But yet the sinner must love that which is pure and right, or he cannot enter

heaven. *You* cannot make him do so. Who can do it but that Holy Ghost who has made you to love what once you also despised? Go not out, therefore, to battle with sin until you have taken weapons out of the armoury of the Eternal Spirit. Mountains of sin will not turn to plains at your bidding unless the Holy Ghost is pleased to make the word effectual. So then we see that as the Spirit of holiness we need the Holy Spirit.

V. Fifthly, the church needs much PRAYER, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace and of supplications. The strength of a church may pretty accurately be gauged by her prayerfulness. We cannot expect God to put forth his power unless we entreat him so to do. But all acceptable supplication is wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost. The first desire which God accepts must have been excited in the heart by the secret operations of the Holy One of Israel, and every subsequent pleading of every sort which containeth in it a grain of living faith, and therefore comes up as a memorial before the Lord, must have been effectually wrought in the soul by him who maketh intercession in the saints according to the will of God. Our great High Priest will put into his censer no incense but that which the Spirit has compounded. Prayer is the creation of the Holy Ghost. We cannot do without prayer, and we cannot pray without the Holy Spirit; and hence our dependence on him.

Furthermore, when we come to deal with sinners, we know that they must pray. "Behold he prayeth" is one of the earliest signs of the new birth. But can *we* make the sinner pray? Can any persuasion of ours lead him to his knees to breathe the penitential sigh and look to Christ for mercy? If you have attempted the conversion of a soul in your own strength you know you have failed; and so you would have failed if you had attempted the creation of one single acceptable prayer in the heart of even a little child. Oh then, dear brethren, let us cry to our heavenly Father to give the Holy Spirit to us; let us ask him to be in us more and more mightily as the spirit of prayer, making intercession in us with groanings that cannot be uttered, that the church may not miss the divine blessing for lack of asking for it. I do verily believe this to be her present weakness, and one great cause why the kingdom of Christ does not more mightily spread: prayer is too much restrained, and hence the blessing is kept back; and it will always be restrained unless the Holy Ghost shall stimulate the desires of his people. O blessed Spirit, we pray thee make us pray, for Jesus' sake.

VI. Sixthly, the Spirit of God is in a very remarkable manner the giver of FELLOWSHIP. So often as we pronounce the apostolic benediction we pray that we may receive the communion of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost enables us to have communion with spiritual things. He alone can take the key and open up the secret mystery, that we may know the things which be of God. He gives us fellowship with God himself: through Jesus Christ by the Spirit we have access to the Father. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, but it is the Spirit of God who brings us into communion with the Most High. So, too, my dear brethren, our fellowship with one another, so far as it is Christian fellowship, is always produced by the

Spirit of God. If we have continued together in peace and love these many years, I cannot attribute it to our constitutional good tempers, nor to wise management, nor to any natural causes, but to the love into which the Spirit has baptized us, so that rebellious nature has been still. If a dozen Christian people live together for twelve months in true spiritual union and unbroken affection, trace it to the love of the Spirit; and if a dozen hundred, or four times that number shall be able to persevere in united service, and find themselves loving each other better after many years than they did at the first, let it be regarded as a blessing from the Comforter, for which he is to be devoutly adored. Fellowship can only come to us by the Spirit, but a church without fellowship would be a disorderly mob, a kingdom divided against itself, and consequently it could not prosper. You need fellowship for mutual strength, guidance, help, and encouragement, and without it your church is a mere human society.

If you are to tell upon the world you must be united as one living body. A divided church has long been the scorn of Antichrist. No sneer which comes from the Vatican has a greater sting in it than that which taunts Protestants with their divisions; and as it is with the great outward church so it is with any one particular church of Christ. Divisions are our disgrace, our weakness, our hindrance, and as the gentle Spirit alone can prevent or heal these divisions by giving us real loving fellowship with God and with one another, how dependent we are upon him for it. Let us daily cry to him to work in us brotherly love, and all the sweet graces which make us one with Christ, that we all may be one even as the Father is one with the Son, that the world may know that God hath indeed sent Jesus, and that we are his people.

VII. Seventhly, we need the Holy Spirit in that renowned office which is described by our Lord as **THE PARACLETE**, or Comforter. The word bears another rendering, which our translators have given to it in that passage where we read, "If any man sin we have an Advocate (or Paraclete) with the Father." The Holy Spirit is both Comforter and Advocate.

The Holy Spirit at this present moment is our friend and *Comforter*, sustaining the sinking spirits of believers, applying the precious promises, revealing the love of Jesus Christ to the heart. Many a heart would break if the Spirit of God had not comforted it. Many of God's dear children would have utterly died by the way if he had not bestowed upon them his divine consolations to cheer their pilgrimage. That is his work, and a very necessary work, for if believers become unhappy they become weak for many points of service. I am certain that the joy of the Lord is our strength, for I have proved it so, and proved also the opposite truth. There are on earth certain Christians who inculcate gloom as a Christian's proper state, I will not judge them, but this I will say, that in evangelistic work they do nothing, and I do not wonder. Till snow in harvest ripens wheat, till darkness makes flowers blossom, till the salt sea yields clusters bursting with new wine, you will never find an unhappy religion promotive of the growth of the kingdom of Christ. You must have joy in the Lord, brethren, if you are to be strong in the Lord, and strong *for* the Lord. Now, as the Comforter alone can bear

you up amid the floods of tribulation which you are sure to meet with, you see your great need of his consoling presence.

We have said that the Spirit of God is the *Advocate* of the church,—not with God, for there Christ is our sole Advocate,—but with man. What is the grandest plea that the church has against the world? I answer, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the standing miracle of the church. External evidences are very excellent. You young men who are worried by sceptics will do well to study those valuable works which learned and devout men have with much labour produced for us, but, mark you, all the evidences of the truth of Christianity which can be gathered from analogy, from history, and from external facts, are nothing whatever compared with the operations of the Spirit of God. These are the arguments which convince. A man says to me, “I do not believe in sin, in righteousness, or in judgment.” Well, brethren, the Holy Ghost can soon convince him. If he asks me for signs and evidences of the truth of the gospel, I reply, “Seest thou this woman; she was a great sinner in the very worst sense, and led others into sin, but now you cannot find more sweetness and light anywhere than in her. Hearest thou this profane swearer, persecutor, and blasphemer? He is speaking with purity, truth, and humbleness of mind. Observe yon man, who was aforetime a miser, and see how he consecrates his substance. Notice that envious, malicious spirit, and see how it becomes gentle, forgiving, and amiable through conversion. How do you account for these great changes? They are happening here every day, how come they to pass? Is that a lie which produces truth, honesty, and love? Does not every tree bear fruit after its kind? What then must that grace be which produces such blessed transformations? The wonderful phenomena of ravens turned to doves, and lions into lambs, the marvellous transformations of moral character which the minister of Christ rejoices to see wrought by the Gospel, these are our witnesses, and they are unanswerable. Peter and John have gone up to the temple, and they have healed a lame man, they are soon seized and brought before the Sanhedrim. This is the charge against them—“You have been preaching in the name of Jesus, and this Jesus is an impostor.” What do Peter and John say? They need say nothing, for there stands the man that was healed; he has brought his crutch with him, and he waves it in triumph, and he runs and leaps. He was their volume of evidences, their apology, and proof. “When they saw the man that was healed standing with Peter and John, they could say nothing against them.”

If we have the Spirit of God amongst us, and conversions are constantly being wrought, the Holy Spirit is thus fulfilling his advocacy, and refuting all accusers. If the Spirit works in your own mind, it will always be to you the best evidence of the gospel. I meet sometimes one piece of infidelity, and then another; for there are new doubts and fresh infidelities spawned every hour, and unstable men expect us to read all the books they choose to produce. But the effect produced on our mind is less and less. This is our answer. It is of no use your trying to stagger us, for we are already familiar with everything you suggest; our own native unbelief has outstripped you. We have had doubts of a kind which even you would not dare to utter

if you knew them ; for there is enough infidelity and devilry in our own nature to make us no strangers to Satan's devices. We have fought most of your suggested battles over and over again in the secret chamber of our meditation, and have conquered. For *we have been in personal contact with God*. You sneer, but there is no argument in sneering. We are as honest as you are, and our witness is as good as yours in any court of law ; and we solemnly declare that we have felt the power of the Holy Spirit over our soul as much as ever old ocean has felt the force of the north wind : we have been stirred to agony under a sense of sin, and we have been lifted to ecstacy of delight by faith in the righteousness of Christ. We find that in the little world within our soul the Lord Jesus manifests himself so that we know him. There is a potency about the doctrines we have learned which could not belong to lies, for the truths which we believe we have tested in actual experience. Tell us there is no meat ? Why, we have just been feasting. Tell us there is no water in the fountain ? We have been quenching our thirst. Tell us there is no such thing as light ? We do not know how we can prove its existence to you, for you are probably blind, but *we* can see. That is enough argument for us, and our witness is true. Tell us there is no spiritual life ! We feel it in our inmost souls. These are the answers with which the Spirit of God furnishes us, and they are a part of his advocacy.

See, again, how entirely dependent we are on the Spirit of God for meeting all the various forms of unbelief which arise around us ; you may have your societies for collecting evidence, and you may enlist all your bishops and doctors of divinity and professors of apologetics, and they may write rolls of evidence long enough to girdle the globe, but the only person who can savingly convince the world is the Advocate whom the Father has sent in the name of Jesus. When he reveals a man's sin, and the sure result of it, the unbeliever takes to his knees. When he takes away the scales and sets forth the crucified Redeemer, and the merit of the precious blood, all carnal reasonings are nailed to the cross. One blow of real conviction of sin will stagger the most obstinate unbeliever, and afterwards, if his unbelief return, the Holy Ghost's consolations will soon comfort it out of him. Therefore, as at the first so say I at the last, all this dependeth upon the Holy Ghost, and upon him let us wait in the name of Jesus, beseeching him to manifest his power among us. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans xv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—912, 446, 445.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"REST IN THE LORD."

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 14TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAOLE, NEWINGTON.

"Rest in the Lord."—Psalm xxxvii. 7.

THE occurrence of our text in the psalm before us is an instance of the great rule that the Lord does nothing by halves. In this priceless psalm the Lord found his servant in the first verse liable to fretfulness and envy, and he exhorted him to cease from fretting; then, in verse three, he taught him to trust, in verse four he led him on to delight, in verses five and six he conducted him into a peaceful committing of his way unto God, and he did not stay the operation of his grace till he had perfected that which concerned him and brought him up to the elevated point of our text, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." God doth not merely cure the evil in us, but he confers unspeakable good. He takes away the disfiguring wound, but he imparts also comeliness and beauty. If any of you this morning are in a low state of grace, so that you have even fallen into fretfulness at the prosperity of the ungodly, do not cast away all hope, for the grace of God aboundeth toward us in all wisdom and prudence, and he will restore your soul. Remember how David said, in the seventy-third Psalm: "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." The Lord knoweth how to bring his people again from Bashan, yea, and to uplift them like Jonah from the depths of the sea; and he can bring *you* by the operation of his grace this day upward from doubt to assurance, from fretfulness to rest.

Rest is a blessing which properly belongs to the people of God, although they do not enjoy it one tithe as much as they might. Under the Old Testament dispensation there was considerable provision made for rest. Typically the chosen nation was shown that one great end of the visitation of the Lord was to give his people rest, for on the seventh day they rested and did no manner of work. Yea more, in the seventh
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year they rested according to the divine precept. "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard." When they were obedient to the Lord's command they thus enjoyed a whole year of rest, and were no losers by it, for no doubt the seventh fallow year so benefited the land that it brought forth all the more fruit during the other six, so that there was none the less store in their barns. Over and above this, once in fifty years when the seventh seventh year came round, they carried out still further the Sabbatic idea, and the Jubilee year was a time of peculiar and emphatic rest and festival. For thus had the Lord commanded. "A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field." So that very prominently even in that somewhat servile and yoke-bearing dispensation there was brought before the mind of the Israelite the privilege of rest, and those who possessed the inner sight, as Moses did, realized the promise, "My Spirit shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." Indeed, Canaan itself was intended to be the type of rest: the land that floweth with milk and honey, the land of brooks and valleys, the land that the Lord thy God thinketh on, the land upon which the eyes of the Lord rest from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year was meant to be a place where every man should rest under his own vine and fig tree, and look for a yet deeper rest in God. Had they known it, in giving them Canaan Joshua had given them a fair picture of rest; they did not see through the type so as fully to understand its significance, yet nevertheless there it was. O Christian men and women, ye also miss much of your rest, ye have too much of fretfulness, too much of care, too much that is servile. The land doth not keep her Sabbaths as she should, neither doth your soul rest as it might; and as for jubilees, how very scarce they are, whereas, if Christian believers lived near to God, and enjoyed the peace which Jesus gives, they might keep jubilees every year, and Sabbath every day. The Lord grant that we may have power to enjoy his rest, and that it may never be said of us, "They could not enter in because of unbelief."

Brethren, the Lord, as if to show us that he would have us rest, has been pleased to speak of resting himself. It is inconceivable that he should be fatigued, it were profanity to suppose that he who fainteth not neither is weary, and of whose understanding there is no searching, can ever be in a condition to need rest, and yet he did rest, for when he had finished all the works of his hands in the six days of creation the Lord "rested on the seventh day, and sanctified it." When afterwards that rest was broken because his works were marred, we find him further on smelling a "sweet savour of rest" in the sacrifice which was offered unto him by Noah, whose very name was rest. These two facts are highly instructive, and teach us that God resteth in a perfect work, and that when that work is marred the Lord resteth in a perfect sacrifice, even in the Lord Jesus Christ. He hath a rest there and he speaks of our "entering *his* rest" as it is written "they shall not enter into *my* rest."

There is a rest of God then, and there remaineth a rest unto the people of God, and of that rest, not in its highest development in heaven, but in its present enjoyment on earth, we are about to speak.

"Rest in the Lord." First, dear brethren, let consider at *the steps to this royal chamber of repose*: secondly, let us meditate upon *the rest which is enjoyed in that quiet chamber*: and then, thirdly, let us look at *that sumptuous chamber itself*. As the result and issue of it all may the Holy Spirit sweetly lead us into quietness and peace, even as of old it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest."

I. First then let us consider certain STEPS TO THIS ROYAL CHAMBER OF REST. How are we to reach this place of sacred repose? The steps are in the psalm before us. The first is "*Fret not thyself.*" You are out in the fields among the wild beasts, cease to hunt them: you are among those who toil in bondage, suffering all the brunt of ill weathers and hard seasons; come away from them. Come within doors, into your Father's house. By the help of the Divine Spirit leave the green bay trees which have cast their shadow upon you and enter into the sanctuary. No longer be as the carnal who envy one another. So long as you are out there among those who lust after evil things and fret against the Lord's providence you cannot rest. While you are agitating yourself to gain what other men lust after and to enjoy what other men take pleasure in you are missing the peculiar privileges of the children of God. While your spirit is running with worldlings in the race and wrestling with them in the battle you cannot enjoy the peace which Jesus left as a legacy to his disciples. Come away then; for the first step to rest is "*fret not thyself.*" The griefs which make the ungodly pine are not for you, for the objects which they seek are not your objects: the losses which make them despond must not make you disconsolate, for their treasure is not your treasure. Come away then from admiring their transient felicity, and lamenting your present distress. Have you been envying transgressors? Count yourself to have been foolish and ignorant in so doing, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Rise above the things which are seen, for they are temporal, and spurn the things which make the flesh to smart, for this light affliction is but for a moment. Let not the world weigh you down, for you are bound, as an heir of heaven, to tread it beneath your feet: the world and all its honours you are called upon to despise, and in order that your soul should not lust after its dainties, come away unto your God, and no longer fret yourself.

When you have thus come out of the field, and have arrived at the palace of love, the first staircase is described as *trust and do*. Read the third verse, "*Trust in the Lord and do good.*" You believe in the Lord's love, prove your confidence by committing yourself to the keeping of him who loves you. You believe in the atonement of Jesus, fly for cleansing to the blood which was shed for you. You believe in the glory of your risen Lord, commit all your future to him with whom you are one day to sit upon the throne. As for all your trials, come now and believe in God concerning them. Do not let anything make you mistrust or distrust your God. Know ye that he is God and "his mercy endureth for ever," and trust ye in him for ever. But let this faith be practical—"Trust in the Lord and do good." A dead

faith will bring you but poor comfort ; yours must be a faith which can do as well as receive. It is through the exercise of faith that comfort comes to the heart, even as the exercise of our limbs warms our bodily frame. Do good if you suffer for it, and you shall partake in the joy of your Lord.

“Commit thy way to God,
The weight which makes thee faint ;
World's are to him no load ;—
To him breathe thy complaint.

He who for winds and clouds
Maketh a pathway free,
Through wastes, or hostile crowds
Will make a way for thee.”

When thou hast learned to trust and to do thou wilt have ascended a noble staircase of the royal palace, and where does it land thee ? It lands thee in the king's dining-room, where it is written—“ Verily thou shalt be fed.” Observe the promise, If thou hast a living, active faith thou shalt be provided for : thy bodily wants as they come shall be relieved, thy mental wants also shall be satisfied, and as for the vast demands of thy spirit, God all-sufficient shall supply them all—“ So shalt thou dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed.” It will be a happy circumstance, dear brethren, if you can come up the first staircase this morning, leaving the fields, leaving the elder brethren out there who complain concerning the many years of service in which their Father has never given them a kid, that they might make merry with their friends, and rejoicing to do the will of the Lord out of motives of love. Let the sinner and the grumbler alone and go up those stairs of active faith, and sit down where a feast is spread, even a feast of fat things full of marrow and of wines on the lees well refined.

We must ascend somewhat higher, and climb the next staircase, which is marked *Delight and desire*. “Delight thyself also in the Lord ; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” Think what a good God thou hast, yea, what a blessed God he is. Remember how good he has been to thee in the past. Think of the richness of his word, the sureness of his promise, the tenderness of his love, and the power of his arm till thy soul shall say, “Whatever I have not, I have my God ; whatever is unsatisfactory, he satisfies me ; and whatever grieves me to think it is so unfit for me, nothing grieves me in my God. I would not have him changed, nor have him change in any respect. He is a sea of blessedness in which my soul doth swim.” When you have delighted, begin to desire. Open your mouth wide and the Lord will fill it. Enlarge your petitions and he will grant them to you. Desire more grace, more holiness, more love, more knowledge of Christ, more heaven below ; and all these shall come at your call. Ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.

See, now, we have ascended beyond the dining-room, and mounted to the royal treasury, we have entered the king's almonry, yea we have come into the king's withdrawing room where he listens to the desires of his suitors, and enters into fellowship with them, and bids them delight in him. Here he bids you open all your heart, and pour forth

your secret longings, for he will lavish upon you the gifts of his love, and fill you with all his fulness. It will be a great joy to you to-day if you have now climbed from the low marahy lands of fretting into the upper chamber of delighting in the Lord.

But you are not up to the royal rest-chamber yet. You must now climb another stair, marked, *Commit thy way and trust*. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him." Concerning that part of thy way which thou understandest and hast under thy control, labour to walk therein according to the Lord's mind, and all that portion of thy way which thou understandest not and hast no power over, leave entirely to the absolute will of God. What hast thou to do in ordering thine own way? "All the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord." If thou must needs have the arrangement of thine own march through the wilderness, if thou wilt advance without the guidance of the pillar of cloud and fire, who is to provide for thee, and whither wilt thou go? Thy fallible judgment and feeble strength will soon fail thee. Leave to thy Lord's will to ordain every step which thou shalt take, and ask only to know so much of his mind as to be able to follow his guidance. Do not wish to pry into the secrets of the future, but "commit thy way unto the Lord." Do not worry about the troubles or the present, but leave thy way where thou hast left thy soul. Say unto the Lord, "My Father, since this road is all too rough for my infant feet, be pleased to carry me, even as thou didst thy people all the days of old"; and his strong hands shall lift thee up, and in his bosom shalt thou ride over the miry places of the earth, rejoicing in almighty love. Commit and trust.

Now this brings us into the undressing room which stands side by side with the royal bed-chamber. Take off the dusty garments of thy cares and commit them to the Lord. Strip thyself of one anxiety after another, unrobe thyself of all that reminds thee of this miry, weary pilgrimage, and leave thy worn and travel-stained raiment. Then dost thou need a candle to light thee to thy bed; here it is for thee in verse six, "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." You feel convinced that what is left with God is safe, you have an assured confidence that if you commit a matter to him you have left it in the hands of a faithful Creator: these gracious confidences will light you to your couch of rest. Like Paul, you will be at peace as to the future whether it bring you life or death, for you will say "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until that day." There is your candle, enter the quiet chamber and take your rest. "Rest in the Lord."

These are the steps which I have tried briefly to describe. There is a coming out from the fretfulness generated by the world and its cares and troubles—a pulling off the shoes, as it were, before you enter the palace, saying to your soul, "Fret not because of evil-doers." Then there is a sitting down to a feast of love by a simple but active faith. Next there is, after the feast, the sweet dessert of communion with Christ—a leaning of the head upon the bosom of the Lord, as John did at the supper, delighting oneself in the Lord, and getting the desires of thine inmost soul. After this comes a disrobing of everything like care, and the laying aside of all that is earth-born and gross,

which tends to distract us ; and, last of all, there is the resigning of the soul to the peace which the Holy Spirit brings, which is comparable to reclining upon a soft couch, provided by him who says to us, "My child, thou art very weary ; rest in the Lord."

" Long did I toil, and knew no earthly rest ;
Far did I rove, and found no certain home ;
At last I sought them in his sheltering breast,
Who spreads his arms and bids the weary come.
With him I found a home, a rest divine ;
And I since then am his, and he is mine."

II. Now let us try and form some idea of THE REST ITSELF WHICH IS BESTOWED UPON US IN THIS ROYAL CHAMBER.

First, it is a rest of mind, of which the prominent ingredient is a *sense of security and fixedness*: a fixed belief in the teachings of the divine Spirit and in the gospel which we have received ; a sense of having grasped the blessings which that gospel holds out to us, and therefore a sense of the certainty of our acceptance with God and of our eternal security in Christ Jesus. Beloved, if you are of the school which shifts its creed every week ; if you belong to the modern-culture gentlemen, who cannot tell us what they believe, because they do not know themselves—who are so eminently receptive that it appears to me that they are mainly occupied in turning out what lumber they have warehoused in order to be able to stow away more,—then you will never know any rest. This hallowed state of mind cannot come to the unsettled doubter. The sacred, dove-like Spirit quits the regions of uncertainty and dwells with those who *know* whom they have believed. Where he dwells there is rest, but nowhere else. Look at John—the blessed, loving John—how, all through his three epistles, he continually uses that word "know." He is a terrible Positivist ; he is sure of everything ; he dogmatizes gloriously, and he rests. There is no rest till you are sure. A little "if" is like a stone in your shoe ; you cannot travel comfortably, it blisters the foot and prevents restful progress. "Ah, but," says one, "I do not know how to interpret such and such a text." Well, then, brother, cease from interpreting it, and believe it as it stands. It is infinitely better to believe God's word than to interpret it ; indeed, much that passes for interpretation nowadays is simply the drying of all sap and soul out of the inspired words, and making them retain only a very dry and husky sense. Be you more earnest to believe than to interpret. Ask, what does the text say ? Believe that, and if you do not comprehend all its meaning do not be any the less believing. How shall God be comprehensible by finite creatures, or his glorious truth be seen in all points by such poor mortals as we are ? Believe, so shalt thou be established ; and then, being established in the truth, grasp the blessings which that truth brings to you, and rejoice therein. You believe in justification by faith ; be sure that you are justified. You believe in the election of God ; make your calling and election sure. You believe in the final perseverance of the saints ; persevere even to the end. Grip the blessings, and then feel that, having believed that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God ; having put your trust in him, there is therefore now no condemnation to you, for you are in Christ Jesus.

As you realise these doctrines, and the positive security—the indisputable security—which comes to every believer who is relying upon Jesus, you will feel that perfect rest which is indescribable in sweetness, the rest "which only he that feels it knows." Our rest is a sense of security.

Next, this rest is, in another aspect, *contentment*—perfect satisfaction with our earthly lot. Ambition spoils rest; the constant greed of avarice puts rest out of the question. The worry, the fret, the fume of accumulating, of desiring more, of impatiently coveting more than God is pleased to give—all this ruins rest. Oh, to say, "The Lord's will be done! Having food and raiment, I am therewith content." "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," and to let ambition, and lofty desires, and fretfulness, and complaining at your lot, all go, and just say, "God hath appointed my portion and ordained all my ways; and so let it be." This is rest. Put this together with security as to the eternal future, and you have gained two very sweet ingredients with which to compose a rest worthy of the sons of God.

"Rest, weary heart,
From all thy silent griefs, and secret pain.
Thy profitless regrets, and longings vain;
Wisdom and love have ordered all the past,
All shall be blessedness and light at last;
Cast off the cares that have so long oppress;
Rest sweetly, rest!"

Next there is in this rest the idea of immovable *confidence*—perfect confidence in God, so that when severe trial comes the soul says, "It is right—I am sure it is right; I cannot see the reason, but I know that the trial is sent in love; I am certain of that." When another trial befalls child-like confidence in God still says, "It could not be better; if God send two troubles, they are better than one; and if he send six, they are six times better than one, though they seem six times worse." That confidence says also, "He will bring me out of it; he never sent me out yet upon the sea of tribulation but what he brought me home again; never sent me to a battle at my own charges yet; never bade me do a work but what he gave me strength for it; never called me to suffer but what he sustained me under the pain." Oh, but this is a blessed thing, to be quite confident that God cannot err, cannot forsake, cannot change, cannot cease to love, and that therefore everything that cometh from him cometh in the right way, at the right time, in the right measure, and that all is well and will end well. Ay, though all the tempests come forth from their caverns to howl at once across the tremendous seas, though every cyclone and hurricane that ever blew should come back again, and my poor barque should be almost a wreck by reason of their fury,—it is well, it is well. If only on a board or a broken piece of the ship, I shall come safe to land, for so hath God decreed. Glory be to his name! I will leave all to him. This is rest—thorough rest, security, contentment, confidence.

Then, perhaps, mainly, to the Hebrew, this rest consists in *submission*, for the Hebrew is, "Be silent to God." That is the word. One of the old versions reads it, "Hold thou still before God." This holy

silence is illustrated by what we read of Aaron ; when his sons died, before the Lord—"Aaron held his peace." Let your tongue be quiet, do not murmur, do not argue : leave all, and bow in silence. "My soul is even as a weaned child," said David ; he would no longer cry after the warm breasts of comfort, he was weaned at last. Now, O Lord, thy will is my will. It has been a sharp lesson, but thou hast taught it to me at last. Aforetime I struggled, but now I acquiesce : once I quarrelled, but now sweetly yield. Let it be as thou pleasest, thy will is mine. This also is rest.

"This is a holier, sweeter rest,
Than the lulling rest from pain,
And a deeper calm than that which sleep
Sheds over heart and brain.

"It is the soul's surrender'd choice,
The settling of the will,
Lying down gently at the cross,
God's purpose to fulfil."

There comes, next, the rest of *patient waiting*, for that is in the text. What does it say ? "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." This is to have desires, but to feel that you can waive them, and tarry the Lord's leisure ; to have wishes, but always to keep them tethered so that they go not too far ; to have a will only in subserviency to the the wiser and kinder will which rules above ; saying ever, "Lord, that is what I think I should wish for, but I do not certainly know whether it would be good for me or not, and therefore I ask thee to deny me if my wishes are wrong. My most earnest prayers, my Father, if they should not please thee, do not hear them ; for I would ask thee rather not to hear me than to hear me if I ask amiss. I have wishes and a will, and thou hast permitted me to have them, for thou hast said thou wilt grant me the desires of my heart ; but Lord, if my heart should not be delighting herself in thee when she feels her desires they shall not be my desires, I will disown them. My supremest will shall be not to will anything except thy will, and if I do will it I repent of so willing, and discard the evil will and the undesirable desire. I will turn all wilfulness out of doors by thy grace that thou mayest have thy will." This is a blessed spirit, dear friends, and he that has attained it has entered the royal bedchamber, where he shall rest in peace, for "so he giveth his beloved sleep."

This rest means also *peace*, peace of soul with yourself, with your fellow men, with God. It takes two to make an enemy, and if you will not be one of the two, you will not have an enemy seriously to distress you. Men may dislike you, but they shall be held in check, for "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." "He maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder thereof doth he restrain." At any rate, the assured believer possesses that peace which Christ had, who when his foes gathered round about him, and sought to catch him in his words, baffled them all by his calm self-possession.

This rest means quiet *happiness*, inward calm. The soul has mounted where it wants to be, and does not intend to move from its position.

Noah's dove has been round the earth and seen nothing but a waste of waters, but she has flown home at last, she is in Noah's hand, and she means to stop in the ark until the better times shall come, and the waters are assuaged. Oh, if any of you have wandered and lost the peace which Christ gives, even that which he gives not to the world, if you are troubled and fretful, and envious, and weary, commune with your own heart this morning and say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Say to your heart as I have said to mine, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." "Rest in the Lord."

To close our description of rest, I think we must add one other term to it, it is the rest of *expectation*, especially in regard to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The greatest fret that some of us ever have is about the cause of God. Personal troubles and domestic troubles sit very lightly on some of us, but church trouble perplexes us. Not in my case, because none of you who love the Lord ever intentionally cause me distress of mind, but there are some who walk of whom we would tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and yet they have entered into the church, to her dishonour and injury. And outside this church, outside in the great church of Christ, you can see everywhere looming heavily over us the black clouds of Romanism, and amidst the gloom the spectres of scepticism are fitting to and fro. Everything in these times seems to be loose and out of joint. The men of "thought" have pulled up the old landmarks, they have broken down the hedges, and laid the Lord's enclosures common to all that pass by the way. Behold they go about to break down the carved work of the sanctuary with their axes, they defile the temple of the Lord. Nothing is sacred for these wise men of modern times, no truth that was taught by their sires can be taught by them. The doctrines of grace to these men are platitudes, and the doctrine of the cross itself is denied; or, when not denied, so obscured that we know not what it is. Scarcely do they themselves know what it is they affirm; they are great at questions and negations. Novelties of doctrine are poured out upon the earth, countless in number as the frogs which came up in the apocalyptic vision, and what shall the end be? "Go thy way," says God to his beloved, "for thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot in the end of the days." Christ will take care of his own church, the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Leave thou all this to him who seeth the end as well as the beginning, and to whom the victory shall surely come. Your strength is to sit still. Rest in the Lord with expectation that he will overrule the evil, and will himself surely come to end it all and reign amongst his ancients gloriously.

III. Lastly, and here I needed time, but with my usual improvidence I have squandered it, our third point is, let us enter and examine THE ROYAL CHAMBER ITSELF. "Rest in the Lord." Now the text does not say rest in anything about the Lord, but rest in *the Lord himself*. Oh that the Spirit might bring us into such union and communion with God that we must to the full know the meaning of this text. "Rest in the Lord"! The Lord has revealed himself to us in

these days in the person of his only-begotten Son : Jesus, akin to us by nature, Jesus, our substitute and surety, Jesus, our all in all. Now, beloved, come near to Jesus by a living faith, hide yourselves in Jesus, enter into his wounds, feel your safety in him, your union to him. Live to him, live with him, live for him, live in him, and as you do so you must rest. Only in the Lord is there any rest for you ; but as you are a man in Christ Jesus and lose yourself in him, your life being hidden with Christ in God, in that way, in that way only, shall you find perfect rest. What a resting place do saints find in the finished work of Jesus ! Let but the Holy Ghost lead them to see the glory of his atoning blood and they are sure to rest. Let me tenderly entreat the tempted believer to tell Jesus all his case, and look to him for that rest which he himself promised when he said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

"Rest, weary soul !
The penalty is borne, the ransom paid,
For all thy sins full satisfaction made ;
Strive not to do thyself what Christ has done,
Claim the free gift, and make the joy thine own ;
No more by pangs of guilt and fear distressed,
Rest, sweetly rest !"

Although this is obviously the main meaning, we may add that, "Rest in the Lord" means, rest in him *as your covenant God*. You have not to deal with an abstract deity who stands afar off as your offended Creator. Behold, beloved, if thou believest in Jesus, the Lord has entered into an everlasting covenant with thee, ordered in all things and sure. He hath said concerning thee "I will not turn away from thee to do thee good." He has promised to keep you and preserve you, and bring you into his eternal glory by a covenant signed and sealed with the precious blood of Christ. "Rest in the Lord." He will keep his covenant even to its jots and tittles, therefore be not disquieted. The eternal shalls and wills shall never fail. "This is as the waters of Noah unto me : for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth ; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee." Glory be unto our covenant God ! Come and rest in him, beloved.

"Then rest in all the relationships into which the Lord has been pleased to bring himself. Know thou that this God of thine is thy shield and thine exceeding great reward ; thy rock, thy dwelling-place, thy Shepherd, and thy Preserver. Best of all, he is thy Father. Oh, brethren, one cannot talk about this, one wants to drink it in by quiet meditation ; it is a bliss too great for words to be indeed a child of the heavenly Father ! Jehovah is Creator of heaven and earth, Maker and Destroyer, and yet I am his child, and as surely as a child may trust its parent and rest in its mother's bosom, so surely and safely may I trust my Father, and rest in him.

But thou not know, too, that to set forth the nearness and tenderness

of his relationship to us, the Lord is pleased to describe himself as the husband of our souls? For "Thy maker is thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name." "I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." Shall not the spouse trust her husband? I hope we will each of us say to him this morning; "Lord, I do trust thee, for I love thee, since thou hast made me one with thee in blessed conjugal union; and I say unto thee to-day as the church did of old, 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?'" Rest in thy friend, thy Saviour, thy all in all. I leave the full list of divine relationships for you to think of at your leisure; they are all full of rest.

Rest, next, in each one of *the attributes of God*. Are you conscious of sin? Come and rest in the mercy which blots it out. Poor sinner, I would fain invite thee with the burden of thy guilt upon thee to remember that he delighteth in mercy, that it is God's joy to pass by transgression. Thou wilt never escape from the bondage of thy sin, except as thou comest to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ his Son. Rest in boundless mercy. Beloved child of God, are you troubled about inward sin?—then rest in his power to break the neck of corruption. Perhaps your affliction concerns your worldly affairs, then rest in the power of God to help you: he is great at a dead lift, and when none can help us but God, then is God most ready to come to the rescue. Rest, beloved brother, in God's wisdom. You cannot see your way, but he can see it, leave it to him, for there is no possibility of error in his counsels. Rest also in his immutability, that sure anchorage amid the troubled sea of life. Thou hast changes every day; he never changes. Come back to him whose constancy of love is a mountain of strength. He has set his mind upon saving thee, and he is of one mind, and who shall turn him? This is his mind—that he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he will perform that salvation: nor death, nor hell shall thwart the sacred purpose of an unchanging God. He will carry out his gracious work and glorify himself therein. Rest thou also in his faithfulness. What he has promised he will perform. He is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said and shall he not do it? Take thou his promise and believe it to be as good as the fulfilment, for so it is.

Rest thou also in *his word*, which he has written for thy consolation. The Holy Ghost has in a thousand ways declared the divine goodwill towards thee: meditate upon what he has dictated. As full as the skies are of stars so full are the Scriptures with promises. Take these precious promises, one by one, believe them, and pray unto the Lord, saying, "Fulfil this word unto thy servant whereon thou hast caused me to hope. O Lord, do as thou hast said." Then sweetly rest in the eternal truthfulness, for the Lord will keep every one of his promises to you.

What a subject I have before me! I seem to be like those bold explorers in the northern seas, before whom a passage opens up to the left, and anon another channel on the right. They sail into the centre of a great bay, and then further on enter upon another sea, and know not how wide the ocean may yet become still further on. My text is an ocean to which I see no bound, it is full of wondrous grace, but I have

neither time nor ability to sail over its shoreless surface. I must leave you to spread the sails of meditation, and favoured by the gales of the Spirit's influences, I trust you will be borne along, not to an ocean of primeval ice, but to the condition of unbroken rest in the Lord.

Next, let us rest in *the will of God*. It is a high point to arrive at to feel that my Father's will is such that I can entirely rest in it, let it be whatever it may; yet it would not be so difficult if we were not so depraved. O for conquering grace to crush down self. I would be as a grain of dust blown in the summer's gale without power to change my course, carried on by the irresistible breath of the Lord: for ever made willingly unwilling to will anything but the will of my Lord. I would be as a tiny straw borne along by the Gulf Stream, carried wherever the warm love of God shall bear me, self delighting to lie low and see the Lord alone exalted. The Buddhists talk about being absorbed into Buddha and ceasing to be, and they make it their heaven to be at last swallowed up in God. I know the falsehood of this teaching, but I know that there is a truth which is very like it in outward aspect. Oh, to be nothing! To be less than nothing! To have no will and no desire about life or death, about sickness or health, about poverty or wealth, no will about anything; and yet to have a strong resolved will to deny self and say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." This is to rest in the Lord.

Beloved, may the Lord, by the Holy Spirit, grant you abundantly from this day forward to enter into this, which is man's first, man's last, man's sweetest, truest rest, the rest of the sinner coming to Christ, the rest of the saint abiding in heaven—the only real rest that can be found, in earth or heaven—rest in the Lord. God grant it to us by faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxxvii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—708, 699, 729;
Verses 1, 2, 5, 6.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

COMING—ALWAYS COMING.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"To whom coming."—1 Peter ii. 4.

THE apostle is speaking of the Lord Jesus, of whom he had previously said, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious," and he follows that sentence up with this, "To whom coming as unto a living stone." Now, I want to call your special attention to this present participle—this act of coming—for there is much to counsel and to comfort us in the fact and the reflections it suggests.

The Christian life is begun, continued, and perfected altogether in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a very great blessing for us. Sometimes when you go a journey, you travel so far under the protection of a certain Company, but then you have to change, and the rest of your journey may be performed under very different circumstances, upon quite another kind of line. Now we have not so far to go to heaven in the guardian care of Jesus Christ, and then at a certain point to change, so as to have somebody else to be our leader, or some other method of salvation. No, he is the author and he is the finisher of our faith. If we begin aright we begin with "Christ is all"; if we go on aright we go on with "Christ is all"; and if we finish aright we finish with "Christ is all." It was a great delusion of some in Paul's day that after they had begun in the spirit, they hoped to be made perfect in the flesh; and there are some now a days who begin as sinners resting upon Christ, but they want to go on as independent saints, resting on themselves. That will never do, brethren. It is not "Christ and Company" anyhow. The sinner knows that it must be Christ only, because he has nothing of his own; and the saint ought to know that it must be Christ only, because he has less than nothing apart from Christ. I believe that if we grow out of Christ we grow in an unhealthy mushroom fashion: what we need is to grow up into Christ in all things, knowing him more and more, and being more and more satisfied that he is what we need. This is really a healthy growth, and may God send

more and more of it to us as long as ever we live. Blessed be his holy name, with us it is Christ in the morning, when we are young and full of strength; it is Christ at noon, when we are bearing the burden and heat of the day; and it is Christ at eventide, when we lean on the staff for very age, and the shadows lengthen, and the light is dim. Yea, and it shall be Christ only when the night settles down and death-shade curtains our last bed. In all circumstances and conditions we look to Jesus only. Are we in wealth? Christ crowns it. Are we in poverty? Christ cheers it. Are we in honour? Christ calms us. Are we in shame? Christ consoles us. Are we in health? He sanctifies it. Are we in sickness? He relieves it. As he is at all times the same in himself so he is the same to us. To the same Christ we must come and cling under every new circumstance. Our heart must abide faithful to her one only Lord and lovingly sing, —

*I'll turn to thee in days of light,
As well as nights of care,
Thou brightest amid all that's bright,
Thou fairest of the fair!"

We have not to seek a fresh physician, to find a new friend, or to discover a novel hope, but we are to look for everything to Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." "Ye are complete in him." Stand to this, my brethren. Never think that you need aught beyond the provision which is stored up in him, for sanctification, for satisfaction, or for safety. Cast not your eyes around you to find a supplement to the Lord Jesus, or you will deceive yourselves and dishonour him. It is not with our Lord as it was with Moses. Moses led the people through the wilderness, but he could not bring them into the promised land: that was reserved for Joshua. Brother, the Lord Jesus has led you so far through the wilderness, and he will lead you over the Jordan, and secure your heritage to you, and see you safely landed in it: look not, therefore, for any other leader or lawgiver. It is not with Christ as it was with David: David collected the materials for the temple, but though he could gather together vast stores of great value, he could not build them up, for the Lord said that this honour should be reserved for his son that should be after him; and therefore the construction of the temple was left for Solomon. But our Lord Jesus Christ, blessed be his name, has not only gathered together his people and the precious treasures with which he is to build a living temple unto God; but he will also build it stone upon stone, and bring forth the top stone with shouting. He shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory. Christ in the Christian's alphabet is A, B, C right down to Z, and all the words of the pure language of Canaan are only compounds of himself. Has he not said it, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end"?

Our text speaks about coming to him, and I shall endeavour to expound it to you thus. *This is a full picture of Christian life.* I consider it to be a complete picture of a saint drawn with one stroke. It is not easy to make a portrait with one line, yet I remember seeing a somewhat famous portrait of our Lord in which the artist never lifted his pencil from the paper from beginning to end, but drew the whole of it with one continuous series of circles. So here I may say the whole Christian life

is drawn in one line—coming unto Christ. “To whom coming.” When we have spoken upon that, I shall answer two questions; the one—*what is the best way of coming to him at first?* the other—*what is the best way of coming to him afterwards?* May the Holy Spirit bless the whole discourse to our souls.

I. First, then, HERE IS A COMPLETE DESCRIPTION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. It is a continuous “coming” to Jesus.

If you have your Bibles open at the text I want you to notice that the expression occurs in connection with two figures. There is one which precedes it in the second verse, namely, the figure of a *little child* fed upon milk. “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming.” Children come to their parents, and they frequently come rather longer than their parents like; it is the general habit of children to come to their parents for what they need. They begin with coming to the mothers when they are new-born babes. Look at the little child; it cannot provide for itself. If it were left to shift for itself it must die; but having tasted the unadulterated milk, it thirsts for more of it. When the time comes round for it to be fed, and it comes very often, it gives unmistakable signs even before it can speak that it wants its food; it knows where to come, and it will not rest till it reaches its place and nestles down. As the child grows up it knows the breakfast hour, and the dinner hour, and knows where to come for the grateful meal and the hearty welcome. You do not want in most of your houses, I suspect, to ring a bell to call your children together to the family table: they all carry little interior bells which let them know pretty accurately when meal-times will be, and they come freely, without persuading or forcing. Some of them are now getting to be fifteen or sixteen years of age, and they keep on coming still. They come to your table just as they used to come. When first you had to lift them into their little chairs then they were coming; and now they take their big chairs as if they quite belonged to them; but they still keep on coming. Yes, and they come to you not only for bread and for meat, but they come for a great many things besides. In fact, the older they grow, the more they come for. They used to come for little shoes and little garments, and now they need them cut of a larger size, and of more expensive material, and they come accordingly. Though they cost you more they come with greater freedom, for habit has made them very bold in their coming. They do not require any entreaty or encouragement to come for what they want: they look for many things as a matter of course, and for the rest they come with all the readiness imaginable. Perhaps they let you know their desires a little sooner than you want them to do, and when you think that they might manage a little longer with what they have, they press their claims with earnestness, and vote them urgent. They very soon find out their requirements, you never have to call them together and say, “Now girls, I want you earnestly to consider whether you do not want more dresses. Now boys, I want you to lay it to heart whether you do not require new clothes.” Oh, nothing of the sort. Your children do not need to be called in such a way; they come without calling. They are always coming for something, as you very well know. Sometimes they

constrain you to put your hands into your pockets so frequently and for such a variety of expenses that you wonder how long the purse will hold out, and when your resources will be exhausted. Of one thing you feel quite sure that it will be easier to drain your purse than to stop your children from coming for one thing or another.

They come to you now for a great many things they did not come for at first. It seems that there is no end to the things they come for, and I believe there is no end at all. Some of them, I know, continue to come after they have got beyond their boyish years. Though you have a notion, I suppose, that they might shift for themselves, they are still coming for sovereigns where shillings used to suffice. When you could put them to bed at night with the reflection that you had found them in food and raiment, and house and home, you knew your expenses; but now the big fellows come to you with such heavy demands that you can hardly see the end of it. So it is; they are always coming.

Now, in all this long talk I have been showing you how to understand the figure of coming to Christ. Just what your children began to do from the first moment you fixed your eyes on them, and what they have continued to do ever since, that is just what you are to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. You are to be always coming to him—coming to him for spiritual food, coming to him for spiritual garments, coming to him for washing, guiding, help, and health: coming in fact for everything. You will be wise if, the older you grow, the more you come, and he will be all the better pleased with you. If you find out other wants and make clearer discoveries of your needs, come for more than you used to come for, and prove thereby that you better understand and appreciate what manner of love it is—that ye should be called the sons of God. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Has he not said to you, “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it”? It is rather strange that you never have to tell your children to do that. They do it without any telling; but you have been told to do it, and yet you do not do it. He complains, “thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob.” The infinite liberality of your heavenly Father has urged you to make great requests of him, and yet you have stuttered and stammered and been afraid to ask, until he now tells you that “you have not because you ask not.” Beloved, let us learn from our children, and let it be the habit of our lives to be incessantly coming to the heavenly Father—coming oftener, coming for more reasons, coming for larger blessings, coming with greater expectations, coming in one life-long perpetual coming, and all because he bids us come.

If you will look again at your Bibles, you will get a second illustration from the fourth verse, “To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Here we have the figure of a building. A building comprises first a foundation, and then the stones which are brought to the foundation and are built upon it. This furnishes a very beautiful picture of Christian life. I have read that there has been discovered beneath Jerusalem an immense cavern or quarry near the Damascus gate. Travellers who have been into this

quarry say that there are niches in the live rock out of which the magnificent stones were cut with which Solomon's temple was built. The temple is up there on the top of the rock, and then far down in the quarry you can distinctly discover where the huge stones used to be. Now there was a process of *coming* by which each stone came to the foundation. Some stones that were expected to form part of the building never reached it: there is one huge stone of that sort in the Bezetha cavern now. It is still there, for this reason—that, though it is squared and chiselled on the front and two sides, and also on the top and the bottom, yet it has never been cut away at the back, and so it cleaves to the rock of which it is naturally a part, and remains in its original darkness. Now, the passage that I would like you to think of is that in the fifty-first chapter of Isaiah—"Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." There are many here present who have been cut off from the rock, and lifted up out of the horrible pit; since which early operation of divine grace they have been coming and coming till they have reached the foundation, and are built up as lively stones in the temple which is established upon Christ. But there are others of you who need further excavating. God has begun his work upon you, he has used sharp tools, and begun to separate you from the world: it has taken a long time to get you cut away from the rock, even in part. You used to be altogether sinful and earth-bound, and you lived in worldliness, just as the stone formed a part of the rock; God has been using his great chisel upon you, and cut you away, and separated you to a great extent from your fellow men; but still at the back, in secret, your heart cleaves to sin. You have not given up the darling lust of your heart and therefore you are not quarried yet, and you cannot come to Christ, for that is impossible till you are separated from the rock of which you naturally form a part. Oh, how I wish that almighty grace would take the saw of the word to-night, and make clear cuts right across your stony heart until you are sawn right adrift from the hard rock of sin, that you may afterwards be made to come to Christ to be built upon him as your foundation. That is how the work of grace begins,—by cutting loose the soul from the evil world of which it has been a component part. This is part of the process by which the living stones are brought to rest on the foundation, for it is clear that they cannot come to the foundation till first they are removed from their native bed in the pit of sin. Oh, may God's grace continue to take out many of this congregation like stones divided from the quarry, that so, by grace they may come to Jesus.

Well, after they had cut out those stones in the quarry, which, with a little imagination, you can see lying there, detached and distinct, the next operation was to pull them up to the top of Mount Zion. It was a long drag up to the summit of the hill. How Solomon managed to remove such enormous masses we do not know. If he had no machinery or motive force that could supersede manual labour, and the force on which he relied was in the sinews of men, the matter is all the more wonderful. They must have pulled away perhaps many thousands of them at one single stone, hauling it out of the pit, dragging it up the zigzag roads till at last the gigantic mass reached its place. Now, there is a lifting, a drawing of the soul to Christ after this fashion, and I see

among you some who have recently been drawn. You have not been dragged by men. All the men in the world could not draw a sinner to Christ. No machinery is known or will ever be invented that can ever draw a proud, stubborn will to Christ. We may tug and pull till we break the ropes, but we shall never make a soul stir one inch Christward. But there is another power which can accomplish the work impossible to us. "I, if I be lifted up," says Christ, "will draw all men unto me." He has such attractive power that he draws the stones out of the quarry of nature, right up to the foundation which his free grace has laid in Zion, and they are built upon him. This is the second part of the work of grace in the soul; first it separates us from the rock, and then it draws us up to the foundation, and in both it is working out our coming to Christ.

Well, we have watched the stone as it has been carried up. What is the next process? Why, the next work is to let it down, so that it lies in due order upon the foundation. The foundation of the temple very likely was far below the adjacent soil; and so this mass of stone had to be let down to the foundation steadily and wisely that it might rest in its proper bed. What a task it is sometimes—to let a huge stone down upon the foundation, and to get it to lie square and true, so that every bit of it is in proper position with the rest of the structure. Picture the process to your mind's eye. We have got the stone upon the base, but half of it projects beyond the foundation, and so far it has nothing to lean upon. That will never do. It must be moved till it lies plumb with the foundation, exactly square with the other stones, and till every portion of it rests firmly on its proper bed. Oh, dear hearts, this is one work which the grace of God has to do with you—to bring you to lie upon Christ, to recline upon Christ, and that wholly, rightly, and squarely. It takes a long time to bring some sinners to this; they want to be propped up with a little bit of self-righteousness, they cannot be induced to lie right square upon Christ; they want to tilt a little, have a little shoring up with their own doings, and a little dependence on themselves: but this will never do. "To whom coming," says the text, "coming as to a living stone." Oh, that almighty grace would constrain you all to be coming till you lie flat and square on Christ, till you have Christ at one corner, and Christ at the other corner, and Christ at all the four corners whereon your soul lies; till you are resting on the Lord Jesus Christ at all times, in all respects, under all circumstances, for everything. Other foundation can no man lay; be ye sure that ye rest wholly upon it.

"Bless the Lord," says one, "I know I have come as far as that. Can I get any farther?" Well, look brother, as long as ever that huge stone lies on the foundation it is always coming to the foundation. Its own weight is always pressing it down upon the foundation, and the heavier it is the more closely and compactly it lies. I do feel myself, now, to be more close to Christ than ever I was. My weight of sin helps to press me down on him. My weight of trouble, my weight of care, my weight of anxiety about the souls of my hearers, and even my weight of joy, all help me to press more on my Lord. The way to be coming to Christ, brethren, as long as ever you live, is to lean more on Christ, press more heavily on Christ, and depend more upon Christ than ever

you did. In this way, you know, some stones seem, by long abiding and pressing, to cleave to one another, and unite together till they appear to be no longer distinct, but one mass. Have you not often noticed in an old Roman wall that you cannot distinguish the mortar from the stone? You cannot tell where the stones were joined; they have grown to be one piece. And blessed is that Christian who, like a living stone, has continued so to come to the foundation till Christ and he have become one, as it were: yea, one in conscious fact, so that nothing can divide them. Thus we continue still to come to Jesus, and draw nearer to him; nearer and yet nearer still, built up into him, perfectly joined in one spirit. Then, only then, shall Christian life be perfected.

These two figures of the babe and the stone have shown you, I trust, what the text means. I have not gone far afield to find them—they lie, as you have seen, in the immediate context. "To whom coming" is an apt description of the whole of Christian life: mind that you make it the rule of yours.

II. But now, secondly, I have to ANSWER THE QUESTION, *what is the best way of coming to Christ at first?*

There are some poor hearts among you longing to be saved. "Ah," you say, "I hear that if I come to Christ I shall be saved; but how can I come to him? What do you mean by coming to Jesus?" Well, our reply is plain and clear;—it is to trust Christ, to depend upon him, to believe him, to rely upon him. Then they enquire, "But how can I come to Christ? In what way would you recommend me to come?" The answer is, the very best way to come to Christ is to *come with all your needs about you*. If you could get rid of half your needs apart from Christ, you would not come to Jesus half so well as you can with the whole of them pressing upon you, for your need furnishes you with motives for coming, and gives you pleas to urge. Suppose a physician should come into a town with motives of pure benevolence to exercise the healing art. What he wants is not to make money; but to bless the townsmen: he does not intend to make any charge or take any fees, but he lets it be known that he has come into the town to display his skill. He has a love to his fellow men, and he wants to cure them, and therefore he gives notice that as he only wishes for opportunities of displaying his kindness and skill, the poorest will be welcome, and the most diseased will be best received. Now, then, who is the man that can come to the doctor's door with confidence, and give a good rat-tat-tat, and feel that he will be welcome? Well, there is a person who has cut his finger: will the doctor rush into the surgery to attend to him? No doubt he will look at the cut, but he will not grow very enthusiastic over it, for doctors do not get much credit out of curing cut fingers. Here is another gratis patient who has a wart on his hand. Well, there is nothing very famous about curing warts, and the physician is by no means excited over his work. But here is a poor forlorn body who has been given up by all the other doctors, a patient who is so bad that he lies at death's door: he has such a complication of diseases, that he could hardly tell what diseases he has *not* suffered from, but certainly his condition is terrible enough to make it appear hopeless. He seems to be a living wonder of disease. That is the man who may

come boldly to the physician, and expect his immediate attention, and his best consideration. Now, doctor, if you can cure this man he will be a credit to you. This man exactly answers to your advertisement. You say that you only wish for patients who will give you an opportunity of displaying your skill. Here is a fine object for your pity, he is bad at the lungs, bad at the heart, bad in the feet, bad in the eyes, bad in the ears, bad in the head, bad all over. If you want an opportunity of showing your skill, here is the man. Jesus, my Lord and Master, is the Great Physician of souls, and he heals them on just such terms as I have mentioned. Is there a fargone sinner here to-night? Is there a deeply sick soul anywhere within the range of my voice? Is there man or woman who is bad altogether? Come along, my friend, you are just in a right condition to come to Jesus Christ. *Come just as you are*, that is the best style of "coming."

Another illustration may be furnished by the common scriptural figure of a *feast*. A king determines to act with generosity; and, to show how liberal his disposition is, he desires to make a banquet for those who need it most. He says, "If I make a great feast to my lords and dukes, they will think little of my hospitality, for they fare sumptuously every day; therefore I will seek out guests who will be more likely to be grateful. Where shall I find guests who will most enjoy my dainties, men who will eat with the greatest gusto, and drink with the greatest delight?" Having considered the matter, he cries to his heralds, "Go ye into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in." From among the tramps by the roadside the heralds soon gather starving wretches who exactly meet the king's wishes. Here is a poor man who has had nothing to eat for the last forty-eight hours. Look at his eager delight at the sight of the food! If you want somebody to eat largely and joyfully, is not he the man? See how he takes it in! It is wonderful how the provisions disappear before him! Here again is a poor woman who has been picked up by the wayside, faint for want of bread. She has scarcely any life in her, but see how she begins to open her eyes at the first morsel that is placed before her, and what delight there is in her every expression as she finds herself placed at a table so richly loaded. Yes, the poorer, the more hungry, the more destitute the guests, the more honour is accorded to the king who feeds such mendicants, and receives such vagrants to his table. Hear how they shout the king's praises when they are filled with his meat! They will never have done thanking him. Now, if I address a soul to-night that is very needy, very faint, very desponding, you are a fit guest for my Master, because you have such a fine appetite for his generous repast of love. The greatness of your need is your fitness for coming to Christ, and if you want to know how to come, come just as you are. Tarry not to improve yourself one single atom; come as you are, with all your sin and filthiness and need about you, for that is the best way to come.

If you want to know how to come aright the first time, I should answer, *come to find everything you want in Christ*. Do not come with a load of your own wealth. Remember what Pharaoh said to Joseph; "Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours." Do not bring your old rubbish with you. "I thought I was to bring repentance." Do not attempt to do so, but look to Jesus for it. Jesus

Christ is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. Come and receive a heart of flesh, for you cannot make one for yourself. "Oh, but I thought I was to bring faith." Faith also is the gift of Christ. It cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; draw near then to that word to find faith. Come for everything. "Oh, but I want to feel." And then, I suppose, after you have found a nice lot of feelings you will come to Christ, and say, "Lord, thou art now able to save me, for my feelings are right." What self-conceit! Come to Christ for feelings; come to Christ for everything.

"What," saith one, "can you mean it, that I, an unfeeling, impenitent wretch, am bidden to come at once and believe in Jesus Christ for everlasting life?" I mean just that. I do not mean to send you round to that shop for repentance, and to the other shop for feeling, and to a third store for a tender heart, and then direct you to call on Christ at last for a few odds and ends. No, no, but come to Christ for everything.

"Come, ye needy, come and welcome,
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh,
Without money
Come to Jesus Christ and buy."

I heard of a shop some time ago in a country town where they sold everything, and the man said that he did not believe that there was anything a human being wanted but what he could rig him out from top to toe. Well, I do not know whether that promise would have been carried out to the letter if it had been tried, but I know it is so with Jesus Christ; he can supply you with all you need, for "Christ is all." There is not a need your soul can possibly have but the Lord Jesus Christ can supply it, and the very best way to come is to come to him for everything.

The best way to come to Christ is to *come meaning to get everything*, and to obtain all the plenitude of grace, which he has laid up in store, and promised freely to give. Some poor souls who come to Jesus Christ seem as if they wanted a little relief from fear, a hope that they may just get saved, and a fair chance of going to heaven when they die. Pray do not come in that way, my dear friend. Come intending to obtain the fulness of love, the uttermost of grace. Some time ago, when there was a dinner given to poor people, they were told to come and they should have all they could eat. Do you know what they did, some of them? There was not to be any dinner till six o'clock. Well, that they might have a noble appetite, they did not eat any breakfast—not they. They meant to get all they could now they had an opportunity, and so they came as hungry as possible. Many years ago, I am told, it used to be the custom of the lord of the manor, in certain villages, on Christmas-day to give the poor people a basin of food, and the rule was that whatever basin was brought his lordship always filled it. It was perfectly marvellous how the basins grew, till at last, when some of the women came with their basins the lord of the manor looked at the huge bowls and wondered how they could dare to bring such capacious vessels. But if he was a man of a generous heart, all he would say to his steward would be, "These people believe in my generosity. Go and fill their

bowls. Fill, and fill on till you have filled them all. As long as they bring their bowls none shall say that I denied them." And now, when you go to Christ, take a capacious vessel of large prayer and great expectation. Enlarge your desire, and make up your mind to this—"I am not going in to be a miserable Christian, with barely enough grace to keep me from open profanity, to whitewash me with a respectable profession, and ensure me against the peril of everlasting perdition: I mean to take a higher aim, and to seek a better portion. Fain would I vie with saints and angels and be the most happy, the most useful, the most joyous, the most holy believer that ever lived, if God will help me so to be." I wish we had some of the old Methodist fire back amongst us again. Some of those dear old people, if they did not know much, used to enjoy much, and when they went to hear a sermon they listened with a zest, for they received the word of God as a fresh inspiration; it was a lively oracle to them. The gospel as it was preached to them awoke an echo in their hearts, they were all alive to its good cheer, and they shouted, "Amen, hallelujah, bless the Lord," as they heard it, for it went home to their souls. Now a days we are very proper and decorous in our behaviour all of us, and we are not a little critical in our taste. As we pick up a crumb of the gospel we like to know whether it is the real aerated bread baked in a tin, or whether it is the common household bread of the shops. The preacher is a "little odd," and he does not cut the bread exactly into dice pieces, and so we do not like the manner of service, for we are rather fastidious, and we air our own conceits by fault-finding. Because the Lord's servant does not very daintily bring us our portion on a silver salver, and hold it out to us, we curl our lip and say, "No, thank you." Oh, may God deliver us from the fashionable stiffness and artificial nonsense. May he revive in us the reality both of nature and grace, so that we may come to his table of love with a good appetite. Modern Christians remind me of our boyish days, when we went to bathe in the sea, and used to dip our toes in the waves, instead of taking a plunge head first. I am sure that to plunge right in is the best way with religion. Throw your whole soul into it, and allow the glorious waves of everlasting love to go right over your head, and then dive and swim in that sea which is bottomless, and rejoice in the Lord with all your heart. But this mere dabbling about with *goody-goody goodliness*, instead of the grand old godliness, makes professors all of a shiver, and they stand in doubt, as though they hardly liked it, and would rather get back to the world and put on their old clothes again, only they are half afraid to do so. Oh, may the Lord give us to come with all our needs to him—to come to him for everything, and to come determined to have everything that is to be had, and to go in for it thoroughly by God's grace. That is the way to come to Christ.

III. There remains one other question—WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO COME AFTERWARDS? The answer is,—Come just as you used to come. Brethren and sisters, the text does not say that you *have come* to Christ, though that is true, but that you *are coming*; and you are to be always coming. The way to continue coming is to come just in the same way as you came at first. I have many things to say about this, but my time has gone, and therefore I will not enlarge, but I will only put them thus in brief. I am persuaded that the only happy, the only safe way for

a Christian to live is to live in daily dependance upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, just as he did when he was a babe in grace and a stone newly drawn from the quarry of nature. I know what it is to build up a nice structure of my own experience on the foundation of Christ, and to climb upon it, instead of standing on the foundation. If you were ever on the top of Snowdon, or some other high mountain, you will have noticed that to make the standing a little higher they put up some wooden scaffold or other, some ten or twelve feet of platform, to increase the elevation, and then everybody wants to get up on that platform. Well, now, I have built my little platform on Christ. My own experience has made a very handsome erection, I can tell you. I have felt, "Well, I know this and that and the other by experience," and I have been quite exalted. Sometimes, too, I have built a platform of good works—"I have done something for Christ after all." The proud flesh says, "Oh yes, you really have performed something you might talk about if you liked." Self-confidence has piled my platform up and it has been a very respectable looking concern, and I have asked a few friends up. But, do you know what has occurred? Why, I have felt my platform shake. It began to tremble. Stress of weather had rotted the beams, and the supports have begun to give way, and I have seen all my building tumble down, and I have gone down with it; and as I have gone down with it I have thought, "It is all over with me now. I am going crash down, I do not know how far, but perhaps I shall fall to the bottom of the mountain" Instead of that I alighted on the top of the mountain. I did not fall very far, but came right down where it had been most sensible of me if I had always kept, namely, on *terra firma*, down on the solid earth. I have noticed that a great many of my brethren have been lately building some very pretty little wooden structures on the top of Jesus Christ. I think they call them "the higher life," if I rightly recollect the name. I do not know of any life that is higher than that of simple faith in Jesus Christ. As far as I am concerned, the highest life for me out of heaven is the life of a poor publican saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." My very good friends are not content with this position, though he who keeps it goes to his house justified more than boasters. Some friends built very high a little while ago, I thought they would soon reach the moon, but certain of them went down in a very ugly way, I have heard, and I am afraid some more will go down if they do not mind what they are at. Give up building these artificial elevations: give up resting on them; and just stand on the level of Christ's finished work, the blood of Christ for sinners shed; the righteousness of Christ to sinners imputed. Be yours the humble plea—

"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."

He that is down there will never fall, and he who keeps there is really as high up as the man who thinks he is all aloft; for all above living by faith in Christ is mere dream and moonshine. There is nothing higher, after all, than just being nobody, and Christ being everybody, and singing with poor Jack, the huckster,

"I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my all in all."

If you grow till you are less than nothing, you are full grown, but ~~few~~ have reached that stage; and if you grow till Christ is everything to you, you are in your prime; but, alas, how far short of this do most men ~~fall~~! The Lord bring you to that highest of all growths—to be daily coming to Christ; always empty in yourself, but full in him; always weak in yourself, but strong in him; always nothing in self, but Christ your perpetual all in all! The Lord keep you there, brothers and sisters, and he will have praise and glory of you, both now and for ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—I Peter ii. 1—16.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—795, 606; and "O Christ, what burdens bowed thy head"—44 Sankey.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."—Acts xxvii. 25.

THE presence of a brave man in the hour of danger is a very great comfort to his companions. It is a grand thing to observe Paul so bold, so calm, in the midst of all the hurly-burly of the storm, and talking so cheerfully, and so encouragingly, to the crew and to the soldiery and to the prisoners. You must have seen in many events in history that it is the one man, after all, that wins the battle: all the rest play their parts well when the one heroic spirit lifts the standard. Every now and then we hear some simpleton or other talking against a "one-man ministry," when it has been a one-man ministry from the commencement of the world to the present day; and whenever you try to have any other form of ministry, except that of each individual saint discharging his own ministry, and doing it thoroughly and heartily and independently and bravely in the sight of God, you very soon run upon quicksands. Recollect, Christian man, that wherever you are placed you are to be *the* one man, and you are to have courage and independence of spirit and strength of mind received from God, that with it you may comfort those around you who are of the weaker sort. So act that your confidence in God shall strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees, and your calm quiet look shall say to them that are of a faint heart, "Be strong; fear not."

If you are to do this, and I trust you will do it, in the sick chamber, in the midst of the troubles of life, in the church, and everywhere else, *you must be strong yourself*. Take it as a good rule that nothing can come out of you that is not in you. You cannot render real encouragement to others unless you have courage within yourself. Now, the reason why Paul was able to embolden his companions was that he had encouraged himself in his God; he was calm, or else he could not have calmed those around him. Imagine him excited and all in a tremble, and yet saying, "Sirs, be of good cheer." Why they would have thought

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that he mocked them, and they would have replied, "Be of good cheer yourself, sir, before you encourage us." So my dear brothers and sisters, you must trust God and be calm and strong, or else you will not be of such service in the world and in the church as you ought to be. Get full, and then you will run over, but you can never fill others till you become full yourselves. Be yourselves "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and then you will be as a standard lifted up to which the timid will rally.

At this time we are going to speak very little about Paul, but a great deal to ourselves. May God speak to us! May the Holy Spirit cheer our hearts, and lead us into the way of peace and power. *If Paul was strong it was because he believed God*: let us speak about that faith. Paul, being strong, spake words of good cheer to others: let us, in the second place, *see whether we cannot speak words of encouragement to our comrades in distress*. We will finish up with such words as God may give us.

I. First, then, PAUL WAS STRONG BECAUSE HE BELIEVED. Faith makes men strong—not in the head, but in the heart. Doubting people are generally headstrong—the Thomas-sort of people who obstinately declare that they will not believe unless they can have proofs of their own choosing. If you read certain newspapers, journals, quarterly reviews, and so on, you will see that the doubting people who are always extolling scepticism and making out that there is more faith in their doubt than in half the creeds, and so on, are particularly strong in the upper region, namely, in the head, only it is that sort of head-strength which implies real weakness, for obstinacy seldom goes with wisdom. They are always sneering at believers as a feeble folk, which is a clear sign that they are not very strong themselves; for evermore is this a rule without exception, that when a man despises his opponent he is himself the party who ought to be despised. When certain writers rave about "evangelical platitudes," as they commonly do, they only see in others a fault with which they are largely chargeable themselves. Anybody who glances at the sceptical literature of the present day will bear me out that the platitudes have gone over to the doubting side of the house. No people can write such fluent nonsense, and talk such absurdity, as the school of modern doubt and "culture:" they think themselves the wisest of the wise, but, professing to be wise, they have become fools, and I know what I say. It is true that the evangelical party had become flat and stale, but the other party have beaten us at that. They are more dull, more stale, and more unprofitable by far. When a man leaves faith he leaves strength; when he takes up with "liberal" views in religion, and does not believe anything in particular, he has lost the bone and sinew of his soul. It is true all round, in all things, that he who firmly believes has an element of power which the doubter knows nothing of. Even if a man be somewhat mistaken in what he believes, there is a power in his faith though it may in part be power for mischief: there is, however, in a believer a world of power for good if the right thing be believed. Paul was a believer in God, and so became strong in heart, and was on board the foundering vessel the centre of hope, the mainstay of courage.

But notice that *Paul's faith was faith in God*. "I believe God," said

he. Nobody else in the ship could see any hope in God. With the exception of one or two like-minded with Paul they thought that God had forsaken them, if indeed they thought of God at all. But there had that night stood by Paul's side an angel fresh from heaven, bright with the divine presence, and, strengthened by his message, Paul said, "I believe God." That was something more than saying "I believe in God": this many do and derive but slender comfort from the belief. But "I believe *God*, believe *him*, believe his truthfulness, believe the word that he has spoken, believe his mercy and his power. I believe God." This made Paul calm, peaceful, strong. Would to God that all professing Christians did really believe God.

Believing God, *he believed the message that God had sent him*, drank in every word and was revived by it. God had said "Fear not Paul, I have given thee all them that sail with thee." He believed it. He felt certain that God, having promised it, was able to perform it; and amidst the howling of the winds Paul clung to that promise. He was sure that no hair of any man's head would be harmed. The Lord had said the preserving word and it was enough for his servant. Has he said it, and shall he not do it? Has he spoken it, and shall it not come to pass? He believed God that it should be even as it was told him.

And he did that—mark you, dear friends—*when there was nothing else to believe in*. "I believe God," said he. He might have said to the centurion, if he had pleased, "I do not believe in the sailors: they are evidently nonplussed, and do not know what to do. We are driven before the wind, and their sails and tackle are useless. I do not believe in the men themselves, for they are plotting to get into the boat, and leave the ship and all in it to go to the bottom. We must have them on board, but still I have no trust in them, their help is of small account compared with the divine aid." He did not say "I believe in you, the centurion, that you can maintain military discipline, and so we shall have a better opportunity of escaping." No, the ship was breaking up. They had put ropes all round her, undergirding her; but he could clearly perceive that all this would not avail. The fierce Euroclydon was sweeping the vessel hither and thither, and driving her towards the shore: but he calmly said, "I believe God." Ah, that is a grand thing—to believe God when the winds are out,—to believe God when the waves howl like so many wild beasts, and follow one upon another like a pack of wolves all seeking to devour you. "I believe God." This is the genuine breed of faith—this which can brave a tempest. The common run of men's faith is fair-weather faith, faith which loves to see its beautiful image mirrored in the glassy wave, but is far away when the storm clouds are marshalling the battle. The faith of God's elect is the faith that can see in the dark, the faith that is calm in the tumult, the faith that can sing in the midst of sorrow, the faith that is brightest when everything around her is black as midnight. "I believe God," said he, when he had nothing else to believe in. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." Say thou, O my soul, "Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, yet will we not fear, for God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

"God liveth still !
 Trust, my soul, and fear no ill ;
 Heaven's huge vault may cleave asunder,
 Earth's round globe in ruins burst ;
 Devil's fellest rage may thunder,
 Death and hell may spend their worst ;
 Then will God keep safe and surely
 Those who trust in him securely :
 Wherefore then, my soul, despair ?
 Mid the shipwreck, God is there."

Since the apostle Paul believed God thus truly and really, *he was not ashamed to say so*. He said openly to all those around him, "There shall not a hair of your heads perish, for I believe God." Now, it is not so easy to thrust out your faith and expose it to rough weathers, and to the hearing of rough men. Many a man has believed the promise but has not quite liked to say so, for there has been the whisper in his soul, "Suppose it should not come true, then how the enemy will rejoice ! How those that listened to me will be saddened when they find that I was mistaken." Thus does the devil cause faith to be dumb, and God is robbed of his honour. Under the name of prudence there lurks an unbelieving selfishness. Brother, lend me your ear that I may whisper in it—"You do not believe at all." That is not the legitimate sort of believing. Genuine faith in God speaks out and says, "God is true, and I will stake everything on his word." It does not swallow its own words and keep its thoughts to itself ; but when the time comes, and others are in difficulty and doubt, it cheers them by crying out, "I believe God." It is not ashamed to say, "The Lord Jesus, whose I am and whom I serve, stood by me this night, and spoke with me, and I avow it." I would to God all Christians were prepared to throw down the gauntlet, and to come out straight ; for if God be not true let us not pretend to trust him, and if the gospel be a lie let us be honest enough to confess it. But if it be true, wherefore should we doubt it and speak with bated breath ? If God's promise be true why should we distrust it ? What excuse is there for this hesitancy ? "Oh," says one, "but that might be running great risks." Risks with God, sir ? Risks about God's keeping his word ? It cannot be. "Let God be true and every man a liar." Let heaven and earth return to chaos and old night, but the Most High cannot break his word or run back from his promise. Therefore, O ye Pauls, if ye receive a message from the Most High, publish it abroad and let your faith be known.

I should like that little word to drop into the ears of some of you who think you love Christ, but have never told your love—you that are hiding in the background there. Come out and show yourselves !

As for you who have long avowed your Saviour, do it more and more, and

"Speak his word, though kings should hear,
 Nor yield to sinful shame."

II. Now, if we have any measure of the faith of Paul, let us try whether we cannot CHEER OTHERS AS PAUL DID. Let the language of the text be on our tongues, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer : for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

First, you will meet with *seeking souls*. They have not found Christ yet, but they are hungering and thirsting after him. They are saying, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" You that believe God are bound to speak comfortably to them, and say, "Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." There is one that is sorrowing for sin. Go and tell him that sorrow for sin is sweet sorrow, and that no man should ever regret that he mourns his faults, but should be glad that God has enabled him to feel a holy grief, a penitential pain. Gotthold tells us that he was called one day to see a man who, when he entered his chamber, burst into many tears; and it was a long time before the good divine could discover what made him so unhappy. At last the man broke out, saying, "Oh, my sin, how I hate it! My sin, how I sorrow over it!" Whereupon Gotthold, who had been sad at the sight of his sadness, smiled and said, "Friend, thy sadness is my gladness. I never behold a happier sight than when I see a man sorrowing for his sin." "Oh," said the other, "say you so?" "Yes, indeed," said he; "there are many mourners who mourn for others, but blessed are they that mourn for themselves. There are many who are sorry because they cannot have their own will; but," said he, "there are few enough that sorrow because they have had their own will, and have disregarded the will of the Lord. I rejoice," said he, "for such as you are those for whom Jesus died. Come and trust him, for when there is sorrow for sin there will soon be joy for pardon." Now, whisper in the ears of those who are penitent. Tell the mourner that God has promised to turn his night into day, and his sackcloth into beauty.

Perhaps you will meet with another whose condition is that he is *pleading daily for mercy*. "Oh," saith he, "I have been praying, and praying, and praying. I cannot let a day pass without asking for forgiveness; but somehow my prayers seem to come back to me. I get no favourable replies." Brother, to a man in this plight you should speak up, and say, "Be of good cheer, friend, for I believe God, that it shall be even as he told me, and he told me this—'Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened.'" Tell the praying soul that praying breath was never spent in vain, and that in due time "he that asketh receiveth." To withhold your testimony will be cruelty to the seeking one, and a robbery of God, to whose honour you are bound to speak.

Possibly you will meet with another who is saying, "I am beginning now to *venture myself upon Christ*. I am desiring to believe; but oh! mine is such a feeble confidence. I think I trust him, but I am afraid I do not. I know there is no other Saviour, and I do give myself to him; but still I am jealous of my heart, lest mine be not true faith." Tell that soul that Jesus has plainly said, "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out," and then say, "Be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as he hath told me." Tell the trembling heart that Jesus never did yet reject one believer, however trembling might be his trust. Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned. Let the comfort you feel in coming to Christ yourself thus be handed on to other seekers, even as the disciples passed the loaves and fishes among the hungry multitudes.

Perhaps you will find one who says, "*I desire the renewal of my nature.*" I am so sinful. I can believe in Christ for pardon, but my heart is terribly deceitful, and I feel such strong passions and evil habits binding me that I am sore afraid." Go and say to that soul, "His name is called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Tell that anxious one that the Lord can take away a heart of stone and give a heart of flesh. Say that Christ has come to bring liberty to the captives, and to set men free from the bonds of sin; and tell them that you believe God, that it will be even as he has told you; and he has told you, and you know it is true, that he will purge you from sin and sanctify you wholly. Any soul and every soul that comes trustingly to Jesus and rests in him shall find sanctification in him, so that sin shall be hated, avoided, and conquered.

I do not know how I shall manage it, but I wish that I could in two or three words say something that would make every Christian here look out after poor seeking souls with tenfold eagerness. I do not know what to say, except this. There is a brother the less in this house to-night. There was one here two Sabbaths ago who never needed me to tell him to sympathize with anxious souls. He was always up here in the great congregation looking out, and then down in the prayer-meeting below on the same errand. Many persons have been invited from this upper service to go down below, and have there been spoken with by him concerning the Lord Jesus. It was our dear brother Verdon, who was a mighty soul-hunter before the Lord. and he lived to seek after souls. He is gone, and my heart mourns him. Alas, my brother, when shall I ever again see such an one as thou wast? Now, I want each one of you to try to fill up his place. Keep your eye on any who seem to feel the power of the word, and then step up with an encouraging word, somewhat like that of the apostle, "Sirs, I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

Now, there is another set of people who are saved, but they are *Little-faiths*, and I want you strong-faith people to encourage them, by telling them that you believe God that it shall be even as it was told you. Some of these Little-faiths are conscious of very great inward sin. They thought when they believed in Christ that they would never feel any more conflicts: their notion was that they should be saved from the assaults of sin the moment they were born unto God. But now they discover that the old viper within is not dead. He has had a blow on the head, but he is not dead; they see lusts and corruptions moving within their hearts, and they cannot make it out. Go and tell them that you feel the same, but that, thanks be to God, he giveth you the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. The poor young soul that is just struggling out of darkness into light, and beginning to contend with inward corruption, will be greatly comforted if you thus state your experience, and declare your faith in the ultimate issue.

In the case of some others of these Feeble-faiths, the trouble is that they are *veiled with outward temptation*. Many a young man says, "It is hard to be a Christian where I work." Many a young woman has to say, "Father and mother are against me." Others have to complain that all their associations in business tempt them to that which is evil, and that they have few to help them. Go and tell them of the Lord

all-sufficient. Remind them that "He keepeth the feet of his saints." Tell them to pray day by day, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Tell them that there is strength enough in Christ to preserve his own. Bid them hide under the shadow of his wings. You have done so, and found a happy shelter, and therefore you may confidently say to them, "Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

You will find others whose lamentation is, "*I am so weak*. If I am a Christian yet I am good for nothing. I have little liberty in prayer, or power to edify anybody. I think I am the most useless of all the family." Tell them that "He giveth power to the weak, and to him that hath no strength he increaseth might." Tell them that the Lord does not cast away the little ones, but he "carrieth the lambs in his bosom, and doth gently lead those that are with young." Tell them of the faithfulness and tenderness of the Good Shepherd, and say, "Sirs, be of good cheer: weak as you are, the Lord's strength will sustain you; and as he has promised to preserve his own, and has evermore preserved me, do not doubt, for it shall be to you even as the Lord has told me." Perhaps they will say, "Ah, but *I am beset by Satan*. Blasphemous thoughts are injected into my soul. I am driven to my wits' end." Then tell them that the Lord enables his people to cry, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, for though I fall yet shall I rise again." Tell them that when the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him. As they feel their danger, point them to their great protector, the Lord Jesus, who has come to destroy the works of the devil, and say, "You will conquer him, you will conquer him yet. The Lord will bruise Satan under our feet shortly. Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as he has told me."

There is much work for happy believers amongst the Feeble-minds, and the Miss Much-afraids, and the Mr. Despondencies, and the like; I earnestly hope that they will set about it.

Now, if you have performed these tasks, I commend to your attention a third class of persons, namely, *those who are greatly tried*. God has a very tried people abroad in the world. I learned a lesson the other day which, I think, I never can forget. I was asked after preaching a sermon to go and see a lady who suffered from rheumatism. Now, I know by bitter experience what rheumatism is, but when I saw one whose fingers and hands had all lost their form through pain, so that she was incapable of any motion beyond the mere lifting up of her hand, and the letting it fall again,—when I saw the pain marked on her countenance, and knew that for two-and-twenty years she had suffered an agony, then I said, "You have preached me a sermon upon patience, and I hope I shall profit by it. How dare I be impatient if you have to suffer so?" Now, if you go and see sick folk—and I suppose you do, and if not sickness comes to your own house—say to them, "Sirs, be of good cheer, for it shall be even as God has told me;" and what has he told me? Why, that he will support his people in the severest afflictions. "In six troubles I will be with thee, and in seven there shall no evil touch thee!" Tell them that the Lord will bless his people's troubles, for "all things work together for good to them that love God." Tell them that God will bring his people out of the trouble some way or other, for he has

said, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." And if you will tell them these precious things, believing them yourself—for that is the main point—having experienced the truth of them yourself, your testimony will comfort them. You will meet with some that have been bereaved, who have lost the light of their house, and have seen the desire of their eyes taken away with a stroke. Cheer them, and tell them of the sweet things that God has said concerning the bereaved. He is "the Judge of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless," and do you make a point of declaring your belief that he is so. You will meet with godly folks who are under testing trials. Many young people have to go through severe tests. I mean trials like this:—"Will you take this situation, young man? The wages are sufficient, are they not?" "Yes, sir, I should be well content, I do not think I shall get a better situation as far as money goes." "You understand that you will not have the Sabbath day to yourself and that we want no religion here." Now, young man, what do you say to that? Do not think twice about it, my friend, but say, "No; 'what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'" Speak right straight out, and do not be afraid to throw up the tempting offer. Many Christians can tell you, "to be of good cheer," for if you do this God will bless you. You shall have even in this life your recompense, as well as in the life to come, if you can be decided and steadfast to stand for God and keep his way. I could mention many Christians who would tell you that when they were tested the Lord helped them to stand fast, and that they have to bless him for it every day of their lives; whereas certain others have temporized and given way a little, and they have got out of God's ways, and have had to run from pillar to post all their lives long, and though they are still Christians yet they never enter into the joy of their Lord. O sirs, be of good cheer when you have to suffer for Christ's sake, for he is able to give you much more than you will ever lose by him, and above all he will give you peace of conscience, which is worth all the mines of California. Should you come under persecution, any of you, I hope you will be met by your fellow Christians who will tell you not to be afraid, for the Lord can make you increasingly to rejoice the more you are despised and calumniated. Believe you that, and you shall find it true.

And, O ye tried people of God, ye that have lost the light of his countenance, those of us who rejoice in God would come to you and bear witness that he has only forsaken you for a small moment, but he will return to you in the fulness of his mercy. We believe God that, whether the season be dark or light, and whether the road be rough or smooth, his heart is still the same, and he will not turn aside from the salvation of one of his chosen people.

Thus, dear friends, you have good scope for your faith to exercise itself in comforting others. Lay yourselves out in this delightful service.

I have yet another set of good folks to speak to. We have some Christian people about who tremble greatly for the ark of the Lord. I occasionally meet with good brethren, very good brethren, who are tempted to commit the sin of Uzzah—to put forth their hand to steady the ark because the oxen shake it; as if God could not protect his own

cause. Some say that the good men are all dying: I have even heard that they are all dead, but I am not quite sure of it; and they ask as the fathers fall asleep, and one after another of the pillars of the house of God are taken away, what will become of the church? What will become of the church? "My Father! My Father! The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" What will become of the truth, the cause, and the church? You know the good Methodist woman's outcry at the funeral sermon when the minister said, "Now that this eminent servant of the Lord is departed we know of no one to fill his place. The standard-bearers are removed and we have none left at all to be compared with them. It seems as if the glory were departing and the faithful falling from among men." The worthy mother in Israel called out from the aisle. "Glory be to God, that's a lie!" Well, I have often felt inclined to say the same when I have heard a wailing over the absence of good and great men, and melancholy prophecies of the awful times to come, "Glory be to God, he will never let his church die out for want of leaders; he has a grand reserve somewhere." If all the men who preach the gospel to-day were struck down in the pulpit with apoplectic fits to-morrow, the Holy Spirit would still qualify men to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are none of us necessary to him, nor is any mere man necessary to God. Do not get into that state of mind which makes you attach undue value to men or means. The salvation of souls is God's work, and if it be God's work it will go on. Be quite sure of that. There is no fear of any work falling to the ground which has Jehovah for its builder. In this church of ours at the Tabernacle we gradually lose our leaders, and I have heard it said, and I must confess that I have almost thought, "If So-and-so were gone nobody would ever fill her place or his place." Such earnest and holy individuals seem to be essential, and we feel that their removal would be fatal. Yet it is not so, dear friends; it is not so. Others arise, and God's work still goes on. Christians ought to be as confident as the heroic Spartans. The old men advanced in procession, and they said, "We *have been* brave," and they showed their scars: and then the strong men in the prime of their days followed and said, "We *are* brave," and they bared their arms for war. Then if anyone wondered what would happen when the old men were gone, and when the strong men were slain in battle, there came the boys and the striplings behind, and they said, "We *will be* brave, for we are Spartans!" I see my grey-headed brethren going off the stage, and I bless God that, though they do not say it, I can say it of them—"They have been brave." Blessed be God, we have also a good staff of active workers of whom I may say, though they must not say it, "They *are* brave." And yonder are the young soldiers coming on—the young men and the young women. I see in their very faces that they are smiling at the thought of being numbered with the hosts of Christ, and I am persuaded they mean to be brave, and to stand up for the good old cause, and for the blood-stained banner of Christ, even as their fathers have done. Instead of the fathers shall be the children: God make them far better soldiers than we have been. Brethren, do not let us be discouraged, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me; "the Lord hath been mindful of us, he will bless us."

Many minds are in a state of great distress about the spread of error. I do not know what is going to happen to England according to the weeping prophets. The signs of the times are very bad, and the would-be prophets say that a dreadful storm is coming on. My barometer does not indicate anything of the kind, but theirs stands at "much rain," or "stormy." Not long ago I walked with a very excellent man, whose name I will not mention, because I think he must have been ill that morning. He told me that he believed that he should live to see the streets of London run with blood, on account of the unbridled democracy, the atheism, and the radicalism of the times. In fact, he thought that everything was out of joint, and we were going—I do not know where. It is not long ago, and I remember that I pulled him by the sleeve, and said, "But, my dear friend, God is not dead." Now, that is my comfort. God is not dead, and he will beat the devil yet. As surely as Jesus Christ won the victory on the cross, he will win the victory over the world's sin. It is true it is a hard time for Christianity, and infidels are fighting us with new arguments; but when I think of them I feel inclined to say what the Duke of Wellington said at Waterloo to the generals "Hard pounding, gentlemen! hard pounding! but we will see which will pound the longest." And so we say. It may be "hard pounding" for the Christian church, but we shall see who can pound the longest. Hitherto—these eighteen hundred years or more—the gospel gun has gone on pounding, and has neither been spiked nor worn out. As for our opponents, they have changed their guns a good many times. Our gospel cannon has blown their guns and gun carriages and gunners all to pieces; and they have had to set up new batteries every year or two. They change their modes, their arguments, their tactics, but we glory in the same cross as Paul did, and preach the same gospel as Augustine, and Calvin, and Whitefield, and the like. All along the testimony of Jesus Christ has still been the same. The precious blood has been exalted, and men have been bidden to believe in Jesus. Pound away, gentlemen! We shall pound the longest, and we shall win the day. If we believe God in that fashion, let us turn round to our discomfited brethren, and say to them, "Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

The last class that I shall notice will be our brethren and sisters who are labouring for Christ. Sometimes workers for the Lord get cast down. "I have taught a class for years," says one, "and seen no fruit." "I have been preaching at the corner of the street for months but have never heard of a conversion," says another. "I have been visiting the lodging-houses, but I have never met with a convert." Well, dear brother, do you think that you have preached Jesus Christ, and nothing has come of it? If you do, you must be a very unbelieving brother. I do not believe it for a moment. I believe God, that it shall be even as he has told me, and he has said, "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Perhaps you preach unbelievingly. Now, an unbelieving word is not God's word. If you preach confidently, and teach trustfully, believing in the power of the Spirit of God, and so exhibiting Jesus Christ to your children and to your hearers, there are sure to be results. The raindrops return not

to heaven, and the snow flakes climb not back to the treasure-house, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud : and even so shall God's word be. It must prosper in the thing whereto he has sent it. Beloved brother, do not give up. Dear sister, do not be discouraged. Go on ! Go on ! If you do not see results to-day you must wait and work on, for the harvest will come. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Be not so cowardly as to say, "I will leave the work." You are not to win a battle in a moment, or reap a harvest as soon as you sow the seed. Keep on ! "Be stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." We say this to you because we are confident ourselves, and would have you confident also. Sirs, be of good cheer. God has been true to us, and given us success ; and we believe that it shall be to you even as he has told us.

III. Now, I have done the sermon, but I had intended, if time had held out, to give ONE OR TWO WORDS OF PERSONAL TESTIMONY TO THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD by declaring that the Lord has always acted to me as he has promised me. I will give one or two.

When I was converted to God, as I read the Scriptures I found that believers ought to be baptized. Now, nobody around me saw things in that light : but it did not matter to me what they thought, for I looked at it carefully for myself. Parents, friends, all differed, but believers' baptism seemed to me to be scriptural, and, though I was a lad, God gave me grace to be honest to my conscience, and to follow the Lord in that respect as fully as I could. Have I had any cause to regret it ? It seemed then that I might soon have grave cause for doing so, but I have had none : it has, on the other hand, often been a great comfort to my soul to feel that I did not trifle with my convictions. And I should like to urge you, young people, whether on that matter or any other, if you have received light from God, never to trifle with it. Follow the Lord fully, and I can say, as the result of actual experience, "Sirs, be of good cheer. No harm will come to you if you are faithful to God and to your consciences."

Again, when I came to London as a young minister, I knew very well that the doctrines which I preached were by no means popular, but I for that very reason brought them out with all the more emphasis. What a storm was raised ! I was reading the other day a tirade of abuse which was poured upon me about twenty years ago. I must have been a horridly bad fellow, according to that description, but I was pleased to observe that it was not *I* that was bad, but the doctrines which I preached. I teach the same truths now ; and after having preached them these four-and-twenty years or so, what can I say of the results ? Why, that no man loses anything by bringing the truth right straight out. If he believes a doctrine, let him speak it boldly. Mr. Slapdash, as Rowland Hill called the bold preacher, will after all succeed. Let no minister say, "That is too Calvinistic, and Calvinism is at a discount ; that is too nonconforming, and if you dare to speak against the Church of England somebody will be very vexed. Now, trim your sails. Preach smoothly. Whenever you have anything to say, polish it, and put it in such a neat way that nobody can object. As the great goddess Diana

now a days is unsectarianism, try and be unsectarian, and all that is sweet and soothing and velvety and treacly, and you will succeed." Now, how has it turned out with me? I wish to bear this witness, not about myself, mark, but about the truth which I have preached. Nothing has succeeded better than preaching out boldly what I have believed, and standing to it in defiance of all opposition, and never caring a snap of the fingers whether it offended or whether it pleased. Young man, if you are beginning life now, I charge you begin so that you can keep on, with a straightforward, honest reliance in God, for be sure of this, the truth will reward those who love it, and all who lose for its sake are great gainers. Be steadfast in following your convictions. I cannot help saying it, because some of you, perhaps, are beginning to temporize a little. I would say to you, "Stand up straight, and tell out the truth, and then be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as he has told me."

May God grant that this little personal testimony may tend to put backbone into certain Christians, for we have a molluscons company of professors about, who do not believe anything, but shape their creed according to the mind of the last person they meet. Go, dear brethren, and pray God to cleanse your hearts of that evil if you have ever indulged it. Believe God. Take every letter of his Book and hang to it as for dear life, and in little as well as in great things keep to the statutes and precepts and ordinances and doctrines of the Lord, as they are committed to you. As surely as you do this the Lord of Hosts will bless you. First rest in Jesus by a simple faith in him, and then treasure up his every word, and keep his every command. So shall the blessing of God be with you henceforth and for ever. May his Holy Spirit work this in you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xxvii. 11—44.

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A Sermon

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"And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark. . . . And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood."—Genesis vii. 1 and 7.

GOD in infinite grace had entered into covenant with Noah that he would preserve him and his family alive. The tenor of that covenant you will find in the 18th verse of the 6th chapter. "With thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee." There was a positive foretelling of Noah's coming into the ark and finding safety. The thing was fixed, and ordained so to be, and yet, when the time came, Noah was not carried into the ark by force, nor lifted into it against his will by a benevolent violence. He was bidden to come into the ark in the most natural manner possible; and he entered it voluntarily and cheerfully. He and his family left their houses to find a home in the ark, and so they were saved. The covenant promise and purpose were fulfilled, but Noah acted in perfect freedom, as much choosing to go into the ark as others chose to keep out. Now, beloved, there is a decree in heaven ordaining the salvation of the Lord's chosen people. It is useless to deny that decree, for even if it were not so, yet no difficulty would be withdrawn, it would only be shifted to another place. Some of us, instead of denying predestination, like to think upon it, and find rivers of consolation springing from the everlasting purpose of the living God. But, albeit that God hath purposed and decreed the salvation of his elect, yet this by no means prevents our speaking in the Lord's name to all men; nor does it set aside the necessity that those men should cheerfully accept the gospel of God, and arouse themselves to obey its command, by the power of grace. My hearer, I cannot tell whether thy name is written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world, but I can assure thee that to thee is the word of this salvation sent, and that it bids thee believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, with this assurance—that if thou doest so thou shalt be saved, for so hath the

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Lord most solemnly declared. The method of the divine arrangement involves an active consent on our part and a willing obedience to the gospel command. The purpose is sure, but it is unknown and unrevealed till the gospel is made known and brought home with effectual power so that the heart accepts it, the spirit obeys it, and the man is saved—saved as a free agent, saved as a voluntary being, yet not saved apart from the secret, almighty purpose of the Most High, nor without the effectual working of his grace. And so we come here, at this time, believing that there are some in this house concerning whom the Lord hath purposed that they shall be Christ's in the day of his appearing. We address you all hoping that the Spirit of God will apply the word with special power to the chosen, that they may see that they themselves must believe in Jesus,—that they must be actively awakened to repentance, to prayer, to a change of life, to confidence in Christ. When this shall happen, then shall the covenant purpose be known to them, and fulfilled in them, for they shall be saved from the wrath to come. Not knowing, therefore, who is to come into this net, we cast it into the sea, believing that Christ knows every fish in the sea and what fish will come to the net. We do not wish to know this ourselves, for it is quite enough for us to know how to cast in the net and to be fishers of men. The practical work belongs to us, and the result we leave with the Lord.

There are two things in the two texts. The first is *the call*,—"The Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark." The second is *the obedience* to the call,—“And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark.”

I. First, then, *THE CALL*.

We remark, at the outset, that *it was a call from the Lord*. “The Lord said unto Noah.” You see Noah was familiar with other forms of calls, for he had been the instrument of many. For many years he was a preacher of righteousness, and the principal office of a preacher is to herald his Master, to make proclamations, and to call upon men in the name of the Lord to obey the Lord's word. “To you, O men, do I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.” But it was not by such calls as Noah could give that men were to be brought into the ark. For albeit we cannot doubt that he was a faithful minister, and an earnest preacher, and pleaded with the people day and night, yet, sad to tell, not one beside his own family entered into the ark through Noah's labours. Perhaps his preaching may have been useful to his wife and to his sons' wives. If so, he had no mean reward for his pains; but to all outside of his family his word seems to have been powerless, as to delivering them from death by the devouring flood. But now he was to know something of another call, differing in many respects, a call from the Lord of heaven and earth whose word is with power. The preacher can only give the general call, and it is his duty to give it to all around him. He is to stand in the streets and lanes of the city, and bid men come to the feast of grace; yea, he is to go into the highways and hedges, and, as far as he can, to compel them to come in. But men do not come upon our compulsion, or upon our call, unless a secret something goes with our pleadings—a mysterious power, quiet, silent, omnipotent, making the voice of man to be the voice of the Holy Ghost, and hiding within the shell of the outward call the kernel of the inner call.

When the Lord said to Noah, "Come thou," he did come. He did not put it off, and say that surely it was meant for others; he felt it to be a *personal call*. It was "Come thou." He knew that it was for himself. God the Holy Spirit speaks home to the inmost soul when he speaks to save: there is no putting off his voice as though directed to another. Noah did not feel inclined to controvert, or plead for delay, or object, or make excuses, or say he could not, for when the Lord said to Noah "Come thou," Noah did come. *The call was effectual*, and resistance was out of the question. It is true the Lord had, in a measure, spoken to the rest of mankind by Noah's ministry, but that form of the Lord's speaking in common pleadings and invitations can be resisted to men's destruction. They could close their ears against the common call, and they did, for it was true then as it is now, "many are called, but few are chosen." Myriads go to destruction with the honest call of God ringing in their ears which they wilfully reject.

"The worldlings wilfully went on
Rebellious, till their day was past;
They forc'd the lingering deluge down
And perish'd in their sins at last."

When that silent call comes, which we are accustomed to speak of as "effectual calling," then, if there be resistance, it is sweetly overcome. The will finds itself no longer headstrong and obstinate; the judgment, darkened before, becomes light; and the soul, aforesaid motionless, cries "Draw me, I will run after thee." Happy are the men to whom such a call comes from God himself. I ask you, my dear hearers now present, whether you have ever had God dealing with you in this powerful, this inward, this spiritual manner; for, if not, I am sure you have never come to Christ. If you have received no call but such as I can give you, such as my brethren who aid me can give you, such as the most earnest evangelist can give you, you have been called in vain, and are yet in your sins. If you are, indeed, the people of God you must know that a voice in your souls, mysteriously persuasive and overpowering, has spoken to you, and said, "Come to Jesus," and you have yielded to it. Happy are you to-night if you have been so called, for it is written, "Whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Now, note that this call from God was of such a tenor, that Noah was bound personally to come; it was a *call to personal action*. Noah must come. "Come thou." It was not a call of this kind—"Now, Noah, sit where you are, and you will be right. Wait, Noah; patiently, quietly wait, and see what God will do." But, no; it said to Noah, "Come thou." Noah must come, and he must come *to the ark* too. For him there was only one way of salvation, any more than for anybody else. He must come to the ark which God had bidden him prepare as the instrument of safety: and he must come *into* it. It was of no use his coming near it, but he must come into it. Within its wooden walls he must hide himself; within its vast chambers he must find a dwelling. And so, dear soul, when God calls thee he will make thee feel that thou must come to Jesus—not wait and delay, but come by a distinct act of the soul to be immediately performed; and you

must come to *Christ* too; for believing in anything else will destroy rather than save you. Your faith must come and place her whole reliance upon the great sacrifice of Christ. You must come *into* Christ too—so near to him as to be in him, to make him your hiding place and your refuge from the storm. You must have an inward faith which takes you into the very inwards of Christ, hides you in his wounds, conceals you within himself. When God calls Noah it is, “Come *into* the ark;” and when God calls any sinner to himself it is, “Come to Christ; be hidden in Christ that you may be preserved as the Lord’s choice treasure.” Come, make the Lord Jesus your refuge, your deliverance, and your habitation.

Now, it would have been of no use for Noah to have gone on making preparations for his dwelling in the ark: that he had done long enough. He had gathered all sorts of food for all the creatures that were to be lodged in that marvellous menagerie; and now that he is bidden to enter the ark he does not say, “I must gather more hay, and store up more corn and fruits.” No, “Come thou into the ark” finished all his labours, he must have done with preparing, and actually enter the refuge. I know some of you have been thinking about your souls, and praying, and reading good books, and attending meetings, and trying to get instruction. Well, so far, so good; but that is not the way by which you will find salvation, the call of God to your soul, is “Come into the ark,” or, in other words, come now to Jesus, and distinctly and finally commit yourself to him, just as Noah put himself in the ark, to sink in the ark or swim in the ark; to live in the ark or die in the ark. He committed his whole future to the ark, and that is what you have to do: commit yourself, and all that is about you, entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ. Considerations, resolutions, and preparations must come to an end and you must in very deed “come *into* the ark.”

“O Jesus, Saviour of the lost,
Our ark and hiding place,
By storms of sin and sorrow toss’d
We seek thy shel’ring grace.

“Forgive our wand’ring and our sin,
We wish no more to roam;
Open the ark and take us in,
Our soul’s eternal home.”

Neither would it have done for Noah to go round the ark to survey it again. No doubt he had examined before that ark of gophir wood, and been pleased to think its timbers were so sound. No insect could eat that bitter wood. It was a tree that would not rot. No doubt he was pleased with the architecture of the vessel, for he had built it with no surveyor there but his God, and it was therefore well built. God was the great Master of Noah’s navy-yard, and had given him plans and specifications. It was quite right that Noah should go and look the huge vessel up and down, and see to the caulking, and make sure that it was well pitched within and without with pitch, and so on: but now he must give up surveying and come to inhabiting: he must come into the ark to remain in it. And so I like you, my dear hearers, to take an interest in the person of Christ, and in the way of salvation.

It is a very hopeful sign when you survey the Ark of salvation and say, "How stoutly built, and how thoroughly well caulked it is; never were timbers better put together, there is no fear of a leakage here; she will live out every storm that will ever beat upon her; she is a true life-boat upon a stupendous scale." I like to hear a sinner say "Christ is a great Saviour: I perceive that he is able to save to the uttermost, and I wonder at the wisdom and the goodness of God that he has devised such a way of salvation." So far, so good, dear friend, but all your admiration of Jesus will not save you. You must come inside his ark. By a simple faith you must at once give yourselves up to Jesus to be saved *in him*. No longer look at Christ externally, nor survey him even with a grateful eye for what he has done for others, but come now and commit yourself to him. There stands the door, and you have to go through it, and enter into the inner chambers, or you will find no safety.

Neither would it have been of any use for Noah to go up to the ark and stand against the door and say, "I do not say that I am not going in, and I do not even say that I am not in already; I have got one foot in, but I am a moderate man, and like to be friendly with both sides. I am in and yet not in. If the door was shut I do not know but that it would cut me in halves; but, anyhow, I do not want to be altogether out, and I do not want to be quite in. I should like to stand where I could hurry in as soon as I saw the water coming up; but, still, while there is another opportunity of taking a walk on the dry land I may as well avail myself of it. There is no hurry about it, is there? You see, if a man keeps his finger on the latch of the door he can pop in as soon as ever he sees the first drop of rain descending, or the water coming up anywhere near him; but is there any reason for being so decided all at once? Everybody likes his liberty, you know, and does not want to be shut in before he needs to be, at any rate." No, that would not do for Noah. God said to him, "*Come into the ark*," and he went in at once. Noah must not hesitate, or linger, or halt, but in he must go: right in. And, O dear souls, you that linger, you that are of two opinions, if you were wise, and did but know the danger of being outside, and the bliss of being inside, instead of hesitating you would want to penetrate into the ark's inmost recesses, and to take your place in the very centre, just as I desire to go right to the heart of Christ, into the very centre of his inmost love, for there only shall I be perfectly at rest. Do not hesitate! Decide! Decide at once! May the Spirit of God lead you so to do. I know you will not delay if the effectual call is now being given; you will be obedient to the heavenly vision at once.

Now, go a little further. It is God that calls, and *Noah must in very deed, personally and actually come*. It is said, "*Come into the ark*." Now, notice that word, for it teaches us that in entering the ark Noah would be *coming close to his God*. "*Come thou*"—Why did it not say, "*Go thou*?" Why, because God was inside and meant to be inside, in the ark, along with Noah, and therefore he said, "*Come thou*." Oh that blessed "*come*"! We had it the other night, you know when we preached from, "*Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden*." "*Come*": that is the grace word; but, oh, it is the

glory word too, for Christ will say at the last, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." "Come." "God is in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;" and he that comes to Christ comes to God. If you find rest in Christ you will only do what the great God has done before you, for he rests in Christ Jesus. He smells a sweet savour of rest in the Redeemer's sacrifice. If you delight in Christ you will only do what God has always been doing, for he delights in his Son: "This is my beloved Son," said he, "in whom I am well pleased." There is no coming to the Father but by Christ, but he that comes to Christ hath come to the Father, and he hath seen and known the Father. Coming to Christ is coming to God.

Now observe that what is meant here is this—that *dwellers in Christ are dwellers with God*. To live in the ark was to live with God. Dwellers in Christ are under the protection of God, for to dwell in the ark was to have God for a guardian. Noah did as much as say, when he passed into the ark, "God is here, and I have come to live with him. God is master and protector here, and I am come to be protected by him." O soul, when thou canst say, "I trust in Christ," then thou mayest go on to say, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." You may "joy in God through Jesus Christ, by whom also we have received the atonement." Ah, how near to God that man is who dwells in Christ! When Christ is all in all to thee, the Father himself loveth thee, and thou mayest rejoice in a consciousness of communion and fellowship with him.

Now, notice that *when Noah came to the ark he must come there to find his all in it*. All the food he wants he must find in the ark. Mistress Noah cannot go out to market any more, her daughters can no longer go to the shops and the stores. Noah's sons cannot farm or trade, or hunt or dig for gold. Houses, lands, *treasures*, will soon lie deep at the bottom of the flood. All Noah has is in the ark, it is his sole possession, his all, for which he has suffered the loss of all things and rejoices to have so done. From the time of his entrance he is to find all his *pleasure* in the ark. There are no outdoor amusements for himself or his family; he cannot even find pleasure in the scenery, for that is blotted out by the deluges of rain; the valleys have vanished and even the hills have disappeared as the deluge has increased. If he is to find any pleasure, he must find it inside the ark. It was a melancholy prospect, indeed, if he could look out from the window, but his joy and delight lay within the chambers of the ark, for there was he saved, and there he dwelt with God. All his *food* also to supply his necessities he must find inside the ark. He had no barn nor warehouse to look to, and there was no port at which he could touch to take in cargo. Whatever need might arise it must be met by the stores within the ark, for there was nothing outside but death. All his *work* was inside the ark too. He had nothing to do now except within that vessel, no fields to plough, no shops to keep, nothing to do but what was inside the ark. Now, when a soul comes to Christ, it commits itself to him for everything: Christ must feed it; you must eat no longer for your soul anything but the bread of heaven, Jesus must become meat and drink to you, for "his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed."

Now you are to find your pleasure in him—your choicest delights, your sweetest joys, all in Christ Jesus, who is our hope, our crown, our delight, our heaven. And now, henceforth, your service must be to him only. "You are not your own, you are bought with a price," and all that you have to do in this world now lies within the circumference of Christ's will. The commonest duties of life are now to be brought within the sacred circle. You have nothing to do outside in the waters of sin and self and Satan. You need neither fish in the waters of sin, nor go boating upon the waves of worldliness; you are in danger if you do. You are inside the ark, shut in with God, dead to the world, and only alive in Christ Jesus, that you may be floated in him out of the old world into "the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Thus, you see, Noah in coming into the ark left everything and found everything, even as by us the world is forsaken and Jesus becomes our all.

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave, and follow thee;
Destitute, despised, forsaken;
Thou, from hence, my all shalt be:
Let the world despise and leave me;
They have left my Saviour too:
But my Lord will not deceive me;
And in him my all I view."

Again, *Noah must come into the ark never to go out again.* "Come thou," saith God, "into the ark." He is not to make a visit, but he is to be shut in. As far as that world was concerned, Noah was to be in the ark as long as it lasted. When the new world came, then he walked out in joyful liberty. But you and I, dear brethren, are in Christ, not to be there for a time, but to abide in him for ever and ever. If any man thinketh to get any good by a transient profession of Christ, that man is grossly mistaken. If you imagine that you can take up religion and put it down again—that you can be believers to-day and unbelievers to-morrow, you know nothing of the grace of God; for the grace of God begets a life, and that life is incorruptible and abideth for ever: nothing can destroy it or remove it. He that is really in Christ is like Noah in the ark, he is shut in by God's own hand. "None shall pluck them out of my hand," says Christ, and, truly, none shall ever take a soul out of the grip of Jesus Christ who is once within it. Ye come to Christ to be married to him. Ye take him, to have him and hold him from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, and death itself shall not part you. "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?"

Noah, according to the Lord's command, *must come in at once.* "And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou into the ark"—come at once, "for yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth." There was a door to the ark, and that door was open, indeed we are not told that it had ever been shut since it had been made. There it stood, wide open. We never hear of anybody that ever went in and was driven out, never

hear of a single beast or bird, or even creeping thing, that ever went in there and was cast out. So long as the door was open whosoever came was welcome, but longsuffering was drawing to an end. The time was now come for Noah to go in, and the time was also near when the door must be shut. And so, when the Spirit of God comes to persuade men sweetly in effectual calling, it is always in the present tense. The Lord never called any man by effectual grace to believe in Christ next week. He calls them to believe in Christ directly, and one of the ways by which the effectual call may be judged is its presentness and its pressing character. It is "*now, now, now.*" Oh, may the divine Spirit be pleading in some heart at this hour, and saying, "*Come to Jesus now*, ere the next word has left the speaker's mouth. Put thou thy trust in Jesus ere this service ends, and thou shalt go thy way to thy chamber and to thy bed justified and saved." The Spirit of God sweetly puts it, "*Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation;*" even as he did with Noah, who never dreamed of delays, but, when bidden to come, came there and then.

"Come to the ark : the waters rise,
The seas their billows rear ;
While darkness gathers o'er the skies,
Behold a refuge near.

"Come to the ark, all, all that weep
Beneath the sense of sin :
Without, deep calleth unto deep ;
But all is peace within.

"Come to the ark, ere yet the flood
Your lingering steps oppose ;
Come, for the door which open stood
Is now about to close."

And now notice, once more—and that is a sweet part of it—that the Lord said, "*Come thou and all thy house into the ark.*" How good it is of the Lord to think of our children ! That he should save us, oh, we must always bless him for that ! But that he should have a word for our wife, a word for our son, and a word for our daughter—this is overflowing mercy ! I have heard of a man who was unkind enough to say that he married his wife, but he did not intend to marry all her family ; and it sometimes happens that your love to a person is a good deal tried by that person's relatives and friends : but when the Lord Jesus Christ takes to his heart the master or the mistress of a house, he is willing to take all the household. He came to the jailor's house at Philippi, and he looked on him with love, but he did not stay with him only, he blest all his household—so blest them that they were all brought to believe in the Lord, and they were all baptized there and then. There have been other households upon which the Lord has looked in the same way. "*Come thou and thy house,*" is it not ? Am I reading correctly ? Look at the passage ; look at it. It is not merely, "*Come thou and thy house.*" We will read it again. "*The Lord said to Noah, come thou and all thy house into the ark.*" "*ALL.*" Oh, that blessed comprehensive word, "*all.*" Then Ham was not left out. Japhet the elder, as he is called in Genesis x. 21—I know not much for him or against him, but he had faith enough to enter the ark, and he was saved

like the rest. Shem, the second of the household, if I may judge from his descendants, was always a religious young man, devout, and attached to the worship of the true God: he also entered the ark, and was saved. As for Ham, the scapegrace of the family, it might have been feared that he would not come in; but notwithstanding all that the Scripture tells us against him, he was assuredly saved in the ark. And here was the mercy—that to Japhet, the elder, and to Shem and to Ham, the promise extended. “Come thou and *all* thy house into the ark.” My dear brother, when you are converted yourself it is a blessing that you have so far a hold of the gospel, but go on to grasp more of it. “What must I do to be saved?” said the jailor; and Paul replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Many cannot get to the second part of the promise. They seem satisfied if they themselves are saved; but oh for that faith which takes all that the gospel is prepared to give, and pleads with God that not only I may be saved, but my house, ay, and *all* my house, without exception.

II. Here is the call, then; the Lord called effectually Shem, Ham, and Japhet, and their wives, so that they all came into the ark. Of that we are going to speak for a few minutes on the second head, which is THE OBEDIENCE. Noah came into the ark and his wife, and his sons and their wives. *Their obedience was unquestioning.* We do not find them asking anything at all about the reason for the command; but they came as they were bidden. They passed through the doorway, and they were all in the ark. Fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and their wives, daughters and their husbands, and all of you, oh that the blessed Spirit would put you now into such a frame of mind that you should at once yield to the divine precept which says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Have you not asked questions enough? You have had some of them answered, but every answer has only helped you to invent another dozen questions. Oh, those questions! those quibbles! those debates! those doubts! those cavillings! They are ruining thousands. Have you ever heard of the man who sat at the table and could not eat till he knew the pedigree of the bullock from which the joint was cut; and then he must needs know how it was cooked, and comprehend the influence which fire has over flesh to make it eatable. Next he must understand anatomy, and know how the stomach acts upon the food, and what the gastric juice is made of, and how food is assimilated; unless he could get plain answers to every enquiry he would not eat. He said, “Plain answers, mind, plain answers to all my questions, or I will never put a mouthful between these lips again.” Now, there was a poor countryman who came out of the field, and saw the meat and potatoes, and he ate them all up while the man was asking the questions; and very wise he was too. I suppose it was his hunger that made him so sensible. May the Lord give you a hunger after the gospel, and if you have it, you will fall to feeding upon it, and receive it into your soul. You will just take what is set before you by infinite love, and leave quibblers to their own folly. I myself have a lot of questions, for the questions I have been asked by sceptics I have put away along with a lot more of my own which are far more difficult than theirs. I mean to bring them out one day, but not until I get to

heaven myself, and carry all I can with me. We shall have light enough there to see by; it is like reading in the dark down here. We will leave these questions till we get into the blaze of glory, and perhaps they will then answer themselves. Noah and his wife and his sons and their wives did not worry themselves about mysteries, but obeyed the plain command and went into the ark and were saved.

They went in directly, but I will not dwell upon that. The whole eight of them passed in at once! To get eight people of a mind to go anywhere is a difficult thing; but here they were, all of a mind, and all ready to start, and they all went into the ark there and then. It is wondrous that Mistress Shem did not say that she could not leave all her acquaintances, and forsake her father and all her relations at once. How could she tear herself away? Good Mistress Japhet might have felt bonds which hold her to her bosom friends. But so it was: the effectual call went through all the family, men and women, and they took up their separated position, coming out of the world at once when the command came. O, blessed Spirit, give such a call as that to whole families!

All these eight people came away *once for all*. They could each say,—

“Farewell, vain world, I must be gone,
Thou art no home, no rest for me;
Henceforth my heart must dwell alone,
And have no fellowship with thee.

Farewell, poor world, for thou must die,
E'en now the floods begin to rise.
I die to thee without a sigh,
Save that I mourn thy blinded eyes.”

There was a closed door between the family of Noah and all the rest of the world. They went in to be the minority, and turned out, before long, to be the majority. Oh, that men would be willing to be the minority in a wicked world, and to be counted fools. People say, “If you join that church, you just shut yourself out from all society: nobody will ever know you any more. You might as well be dead and buried.” But, truly, when a soul gives itself to Christ it feels itself to be dead and buried to the world, and says to it “Adieu, we are henceforth strangers.” The regenerate pass straight away from communion with this world, to hold all their communion inside the ark—to have all their fellowship in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now to Noah and to his wife and to all the family *this was the most important event that ever happened to them*. When all of them passed out of the world together to find their refuge where God had provided it—it was *the* great day with Noah's household. What a glorious day it is with men and women when they come to Christ! Their birthday is noteworthy, but this is better. They were only born to sorrow and death at first: now are they born to heaven and eternal life. Their marriage-day! This is better. They were but joined to a mortal in bonds that death will sever, but now are they married unto Christ in everlasting wedlock.

Moreover, simple as the act of going into the ark may seem, *it was*

of the most remarkable events in human history. When Noah and his family entered into the ark it was a more important day than when empires rise or fall, for there would have been an utter end of the human race if it had not been for their decided action on that memorable day.

So, when men give themselves to Christ, they do not know what mighty things they are doing for their posterity and for those immediately around them. Time and eternity quiver with the force of their decision. These converts will be a blessing to the town in which they live, adding to the society in which they move. The salvation of that man will be the salvation of her grandchildren, and of their children right on. Who knows, when a man is born to God, but that there will spring from him in future years a godly seed that shall become disciples of Christ and missionaries of the cross? It is a grand event when a family is saved. I heard some music in the street just now, it seemed to me to be playing in good time to keep tune with the world; we ought to feel when father, mother, sons, and daughters enter the kingdom of Christ and find salvation there. Oh, if households enter into the kingdom, the very bells of heaven may ring again and again and again with joy that hath many joys within it.

Now let us go into details. The first fact is that *Noah went in*. Was that right? Noah was the leader. The husband is the head of the household, or ought to be, and he should go to Christ first. Whether his wife comes in, or Shem, or Ham comes in, whoever will come in, or go out, Noah goes in first, for he would obey the Lord. Head of the household, are you in the ark? Are you in Christ? You are a father, you have sons grown up around you, are you decided? You want your family to grow up in the fear of God; I hope you do. But can you expect it if you are not saved yourself? If Noah had not gone into the ark, I should not expect to read that Shem and Ham and Japheth went in. O you that are heads of households, your position is very responsible. You will have to bear much blame if your children stray. Unless your example is decided for the Lord, they will be led astray. To say at the last great day, "Our father was half-hearted, and how could we be expected to give our hearts to God?"

In the text *his sons* are mentioned. "Noah went in and his sons"—three fellows. A happy father is he who has sons that will go with him in the things of God. Sons are called in Hebrew "builders," because they build up a man's house; may the Holy Spirit build them into the church. I would to God there were more young men joining the church—that more sons were decided! You cannot expect, can you, to see the sons' wives brought unless the sons are on the Lord's side? I am sorry to say, they are often opposers; and, when the women are brought to Christ, there are the husbands standing back, and even acting as a hindrance to the religion of their wives. God grant it may be so in any case here! O son of Noah, go into the ark with your father. O child of a godly parent, follow your father to Christ, that you may follow him to heaven. Let Abraham's son be an Isaac, and Isaac's son be a Jacob, and Jacob's son be a Joseph; and so may it go from generation to generation.

The next person who is mentioned is *the old lady*—namely, Noah's wife. I give her that name because she was, no doubt, somewhere about

six hundred years old, and she was assuredly an eminent woman. We usually describe persons who have grown up sons by that name in our family circles. The wife of the father of three sons comes into the ark. I think of her as of a queenly dame with her sons and their wives, coming boldly forward with a quiet grace and firmness to go with her beloved husband to sink or swim with him, casting in her lot with him, not only because he was her husband, but because he had cast in his lot with God. Oh, beloved woman, advancing into years, with a grown-up family about you, if you have not come to Christ I trust you may, that in your family the saved ones may be as Noah and his sons *and his wife*.

Last came *the sons' wives*, and what a happy circumstance for them! I was thinking, as I turned over the subject, how painful it would have been if one of the boys had not come in, and then how grievous it would have been if one of the wives had not come. If Noah had been obliged to know that one of them should be left out, and he had to have the dreadful selection, whom do you suppose he would have left out? I cannot imagine. I have heard of the Irishman with his seven or eight children, and someone was willing to adopt one; but the question was—which was it to be? One is to be taken out of the family and they are not to see it again, it is to be brought up and taken care of by a stranger: the father and mother could never agree which it should be. I hope, dear fathers and mothers, you will never agree to have *one* of your children lost. Make it your daily and nightly prayer, your incessant effort, your hourly desire, that not only Shem and Ham and Japhet may be brought, but their wives too, till not one shall be left behind, but the whole family shall be saved in Christ Jesus.

Now, all this was done by the sweet, effectual calling of the Divine Spirit; and let us pray to-night, each one, that the same call may be given to all our friends, and kinsfolk, and all assembled here, that we may be all in Christ, both now and in the last great day. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—429, 501, 489.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LOVE'S MEDICINES AND MIRACLES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 21ST, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."—Isaiah xxxviii. 17.

HEZEKIAH'S recovery is a notable encouragement to prayer. If ever there was a case in the world wherein it seemed impossible that prayer could be of any avail, it was that of Hezekiah. It was perceivable by everybody around him that he was sick unto death. Why then think of prayer? The case was fatal. Would it not expose prayer to derision if such a matter were taken before the mercy seat? Moreover, God's own word spoken by his servant the prophet had been given: "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live." What could be the use of prayer after that? Might it not be regarded as an impertinent interference with the known will of the Lord? Yet, brethren, the proverb saith that hunger breaks through stone walls; and so the desire to live on the king's part drove him to pray: through all arguments and reasonings did Hezekiah's prayer break its way to the throne of God. He turned his face to the wall in more than one sense on that occasion, for it seemed as if a wall stood in the front of him, and shut out all hope of life: yet he turned his face to it, and prayed his way through it.

Mark well his success. Fifteen years longer did he live in answer to his entreaties. Brother, pray if you are between the jaws of death and hell. Pray, brother, if all hope seem to be utterly slain; ay, and if thou canst put thy finger on passages of God's own word which apparently condemn thee, still pray. Whether thy fears have contorted those threatening passages or not, though many of them frown upon thee, still pray. Perish with thy hand on the horn of the altar if perish thou must. Never believe thy case to be utterly hopeless so long as thou canst plead with God. There can be no hurt come of thy supplication, but good must come of it in some form or other. If God do

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not prolong life in answer to prayer, as often as he may not, or nobody would ever die, yet still he may give a greater blessing than continued earthly existence; and if it be a greater blessing in God's judgment, it is better for us to receive it than to have the precise thing we have craved. In all cases "pray without ceasing." The mercy seat once stood within the veil where none could approach it except at one set season in the year; but now the veil is rent from top to bottom, and you may come to it when you will. Therefore I charge you come boldly unto the throne of the heavenly grace in every time of need; yea, draw near in the darkest night, and in the most wintry season, when God seems to have forgotten to be gracious, and when thou thinkest he will be favourable no more. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." Pray in the teeth of difficulty, pray though impossibility seem to stand in the way, pray against death and the devil; pray like Mamasseh in the low dungeon, and like Jonah out of the belly of hell. Pray against conscience and carnal reason; I was going to say even pray against thy terrifying interpretation of God's word itself, for thou must surely have misread it if thou hast thought that it forbids thee to pray: it cannot be so, since Jehovah's glorious memorial is that he is the God that heareth prayer. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye my face in vain. He may say, and he knows his own meaning when he says it, "Thou shalt die, and not live," and yet he may afterwards declare, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." He will be favourable unto the voice of thy supplication.

That lesson having been learned, we shall now proceed to consider Hezekiah's prayer in detail. God grant that from his experience we may derive instruction, and if in its bitterness we have already had fellowship with the royal suppliant, may the Lord grant unto us to have communion with him in the sweeter part of it, so that we also may feel our souls brought up from the pit of corruption to celebrate the praises of our pardoning God.

I see in the text three things to think about at this time: the first is *a healthful bitterness*—"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness," the second is *delivering love*—"But thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption," and the third is *absolute pardon*—"Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

Before, however, I divided my text, I ought to have given you another translation of it. Not that I would readily find fault with our version at any time, for it is, as a rule, marvellously correct and singularly forcible, and I am afraid when the new translation of the Bible comes out it will be better to light our fires with it than to give up the old version, which is so dear to us and so interwoven into all our religious life. I trust our grandfather's Bible will maintain its hold on the mind of the English public against all comers, for it is so simple and yet so sublime, so homely and yet so heavenly in style. The translation which I shall now submit to you is, however, more exactly literal according to the Hebrew: "Behold, to peace my bitter bitterness"; or, "Marah, Marah," "and thou hast loved my soul from the pit of destruction, because thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

I. *Our first head is HEALTHFUL BITTERNESS*, and you have it in the

first sentence, which runs in Hebrew very nearly as follows—"Behold, to peace (or to health) my bitter bitterness." Our translators have given us, as it were, an interpretation of it rather than a translation; do not dispute their interpretation, but yet it does not embrace all the meaning which the words convey to the instructed reader. The Hebrew is abrupt, sententious, and full of teaching—"Behold, to peace my bitter bitterness."

This means, first, that *he underwent a great, sad, and unexpected change*. His peace, according to our version, was taken away, and for it he had great bitterness. The city of Jerusalem had been surrounded by Rabshakeh's armies; Sennacherib had sent his lieutenant to demand immediate surrender, and that commander had written a letter full of blasphemy and contempt. Hezekiah, having but little faith, was terribly cast down; but though he had not grace sufficient to be at ease in his mind he had wisdom enough to go to his God in prayer. He spread the letter of Rabshakeh before the Lord, and in due season he obtained an answer which more than satisfied him. "The king of Assyria shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it." The angel of the Lord smote the armed men of the king of Assyria in their thousands, and the tyrant hearing a rumour, fled to his own capital, where his sons smote him with the sword. There was an end of Sennacherib, and one would have said, and doubtless Hezekiah did say, "Now I shall have a long season of quiet; I shall reign in power over my country, watch over its interests, promote the happiness of my people, discharge justice, build up an empire, and then by-and-by when I grow grey in years in the fulness of time I shall be gathered to my fathers in peace, as a shock of corn cometh in its season." Instead of this, while he was in the meridian of his age, and had as yet no heir to his crown, he finds himself smitten with a painful, debilitating, and depressing disease, and he knows that he must die. Hear him as, to the music of sighs and groans, he sings a mournful ditty—"I shall go to the gates of the grave, I am deprived of the residue of my years." Ah, brethren, let us never boast ourselves of to-morrow, for we know not what a day may bring forth. The promises of the opening morning are not often fulfilled, clouds gather and the sun which rose in splendour sets in showers. We reckon that now we have made our nest as downy as it can be, and we who ought to know better yet say, "Soul, take thine ease: my mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved." But ah, how soon the mountain shakes, the nest is filled with thorns, and the joy vanishes. The great Master of the feast comes in, clears the tables, takes away the fat things full of marrow and the wines on the lees well refined, and instead thereof bids his servitors bring forth the wine of astonishment and the bread of sorrow. Ah, what changes may come! What changes have come to some here present. You have gained the object of your life, and then have been disappointed in it; you have after many a struggle reached the position you sought for so eagerly, and now you find it a hard, uncomfortable ledge of rock overhung with thorns and briars. You thought that when a certain trial was surmounted, which had so long been the "hill difficulty" of your way, you would come to a level plain whereon your willing feet should

joyfully trip towards heaven ; but now fresh mountains rise before you, unexpected Alps lift up their frowning battlements, and your spirit is filled with heaviness at the dreary prospect : for peace you have great bitterness. Now, if this be so with you, count it no strange thing, and do not imagine that an uncommon experience has happened unto you. It was so with Hezekiah, and has been so with tens of thousands of others whom the Lord has loved.

Notice, further, that *Hezekiah's condition was one of emphatic sorrow*, for he says, "Behold to peace, Marah Marah,—bitter bitter," or "bitter bitterness." We read that when the children of Israel came to Marah they could not drink of the waters, for they were bitter. Nobody knows, unless they have experienced it, what parching thirst is, and how cruel is the disappointment when, seeing water before you, you discover it to be so brackish that you cannot drink it. It tantalizes a man when he is least able to exhibit patience, and so it intensifies the previous pain of the thirst. Marah was a notable spot in the journeys of the children of Israel, and Hezekiah had come spiritually to a double Marah, a Marah Marah. Have you, dear friends, ever passed that way and drank of double bitterness—the wormwood and the gall. Beloved, some of us know what it means, for we have had at the same time a body racked with pain, and a soul full of heaviness. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Perhaps the double Marah has come in another form : it is a time of severe trouble, and just then the friend in whom you trusted has forsaken you ; this is sorrow upon sorrow. Or peradventure you are in temporal difficulties, and at the same time in great spiritual straits : here also is Marah Marah. The flying fish is pursued by a fierce enemy in the sea, and when it flies into the air birds of prey are eager after it ; in like manner both in temporal and spiritual things we are assailed. Paul notes in his famous voyage that he came to a place where two seas met : have you ever sailed through such a dangerous part of the sea ? I doubt not that you have, and have at the same time found both trouble and sorrow. Well, then, again I say unto you, count it not strange concerning the fiery trial, as though some strange thing had happened unto you ; for the like affliction has happened unto many of your brethren ; yea, it has so often happened as to become a proverb that "ill things seldom come alone." Lo, on the heels of the first of Job's messengers there hastens another. If the Sabeans have taken away the oxen and the asses, we may be sure that the fire of God will be upon the sheep, and the Chaldeans are already after the camels : nay, do not wonder if the wind from the wilderness has smitten the four corners of the house and buried the children in the ruins, for adversities usually hunt in packs. Deep calleth unto deep. Like countless birds which fly over our heads, migrating to distant lands, so do trials pass over us in clouds, and we are startled as we hear strange and mysterious voices threatening grievous ills.

Now, notice, that the meaning of our verse is not at all exhausted by this explanation ; we find in it a better meaning by far. "Behold to peace bitter bitterness," that is to say, *the king's double bitterness wrought his peace and health*. Take the word in the sense of health first. The illustration of the text is well known. Many a time when

a man has been exceedingly ill, the medicine which has met his case has been intensely disagreeable to the taste ; it has been as gall to his palate, but it has operated as a strengthening tonic, it has chased out the fever, and purged away the cause of the malady, and the man has recovered. Hezekiah bore witness that God had sanctified his bodily sickness and his mental sorrow to his spiritual health. Is it not often so with us ? " Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." Hezekiah had time during his sickness to consider his disorderly house. While he lay with his face to the wall, he read a great deal upon that wall which he had seen nowhere else : a handwriting flamed forth in burning letters before his conscience, and this was the interpretation thereof—" *Set thine house in order.*" This writing would remain before his eyes even after he was respited. The death-warrant was cancelled, but the mandate was not retracted—" *Set thine house in order.*" It needed setting in order, and his first occupation was to look into home affairs, uncover family abuses, and search into personal errors. In his quiet chamber the king would look over the administration of his kingdom, and note the many mistakes he had made, the wrong acts which he had permitted in his subordinates, and all the abuses of the times. Among the rest, his own personal unbelief would rise before him, he would remember his fear and distrust, and mourn over them. He had evidently been far more daunted by Rabshakeh at the first than he ought to have been, for Isaiah to comfort him said, " Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard." He would think his whole life over, and beginning with himself would search out all errors of the state and of the church. Self-examination is a great benefit to us, brethren, and anything which brings us to it does us real service. Brother, go over the whole of your spiritual farm, be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and look well to your herds. Break up the fallow ground and clear out the thorns. Take the little foxes which spoil the vines, and chase away the birds which devour the seed. Let all things be in the best condition—thus will your sickness work your health by discovering the secret source of your malady.

The king's bitterness of soul then led him to repent of his wrong, doing, as he saw wherein he had sinned. He mourned his folly before God, and humbled himself because of the inward sinfulness of nature out of which the outward transgression had come. I am sure that very often sickness reveals a man to himself. We seldom see ourselves till sorrow holds up the glass before our eyes. Self is an unpleasant subject for study, anatomy is nothing to it : to dissect a corpse is not half so disagreeable as to examine your own character. Have you ever laid yourself upon the table, cut deep with the dissecting knife, laid bare the inward parts, and opened up the hidden things of the heart ? Have you taken yourself to pieces bone by bone ? When you have got as far as your heart, have you not earnestly wished that you could avoid making any pre-mortem examination of that desperately diseased organ ? Ah, me ! what a humiliating piece of business is the anatomizing of the natural heart, that heart which is deceitful above all things, that heart out of which come envyings and murders. We flinch from this till sickness and despondency strap us down and work away with the surgical knife ; and yet this is one of the most beneficial of operations, for

"by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of our spirit." Ah, this bitter bitterness, which makes us look within and see ourselves in our true colours, is of far more use to us than those dainty repasts which make us like the Israelites with the quails, full of meat, but also nigh unto cursing.

I can well imagine that *this bitter bitterness made Hezekiah see the need of his God more than ever he had seen it before.* He knew in whose hand his breath was, and felt his entire dependence upon the divine will. He saw himself to be absolutely in God's power, as much as the thread is under the hand of the weaver, who snaps it whenever he pleases, or as the prey is under the power of the lion who can break all its bones. Now he learned to cling to the Lord his God, and to cry, "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me." Now he knew that the Lord was ready to save him, and while his heart was filled with joy because of the promise of prolonged life, he was also full of shame that he had ever doubted the power and grace of God in the hour of trouble. He would henceforth feel that the Almighty Lord who could bring back the shadow upon the sun-dial ten degrees could as readily check the wrath and power of the most terrible invader : he who could deliver him from the gates of the grave, could assuredly save him from the rage of mortal man ; and he who used a poor lump of figs to disappoint death of its prey, could also employ the weakest means to overthrow the most potent foe of Israel. Henceforth he would lean upon the Eternal, and bid the virgin daughter of Zion despise her adversary and laugh him to scorn. After that schooling Hezekiah would exhibit greater spiritual strength, more confidence in the promise, more power with God, more zeal in the divine service, and his peace would come back to him and would be even deeper than at the first. That joy which had fled because of sin and God's visitation on account thereof, returned to him once more ; he felt himself happier because he was holier ; he felt himself strengthened because the blessed purgative, though bitter, had removed a constant source of weakness ; and he rose from his bed, not merely a new man in bodily health, but, a renewed man as to his entire spiritual nature. How sweet are the uses of adversity when the Holy Spirit uses his sacred art upon the soul and turns the brine of tears into a sacred salt wherewith to season the spirit.

Before I leave this point I would express my prayerful desire that this may be the result of every drop of bitter which any of you may ever taste throughout your future lives. If you are not the Lord's people, your bitterness has no blessing in it, on the contrary, you may look upon it as a foretaste of that endless Marah by whose brackish fountain the impenitent must sit and weep for ever ; but if you are the Lord's child, believing in Christ Jesus, all is well, "for we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose."

II. Now we come to the second part of our text, which is peculiarly sweet to our souls, for it sets forth **LOVING DELIVERANCE.** The original runs thus : "And thou hast loved my soul from the pit of destruction." Taken in its first sense, the king ascribes to the love of God his deliverance from death and the grave ; and praises God for his restoration to the land of the living. But the words of inspired men

frequently have a deeper significance than appears upon the surface, and indeed they often conceal an inner sense which perhaps they themselves did not perceive, and hence the king's words are as dark sayings upon a harp full of meaning within meaning. At any rate, taking the language out of the mouth of Hezekiah, we will use it for expressing our own emotions, and give to it a wider sense if such be not the original range of its meaning.

Let us notice three things, *the deed of grace*, "Thou hast brought my soul from the pit of corruption;" secondly, *the power by which it was performed*, "Thou hast loved my soul out of the pit of corruption;" and thirdly, the *modus operandi*, which is indicated by another and equally good translation, "Thou hast embraced my soul from the pit of corruption."

First, then, *the deed of grace* of which you and I can sing. "The Lord delivered us from the pit of corruption." First, from the pit of hell. Ah, there I should have gone long, long ago if mercy had not interposed. "A platitude," says one. Ah, brother, God save you from thinking the acknowledgment of God's choicest mercies to be a platitude. I reckon that those in hell would think it no platitude for us to bless God that we are not in their torments. Our sins, like millstones about our neck, might have sunk us in the sea of divine wrath twenty years ago; and is it not a thing to be spoken of again and again, a mercy to bless God for, that we are not in the abode of condemned souls? Is it not even more a reason for gratitude that we never shall be there? Believing in Jesus Christ, and resting in the atoning blood, "there is therefore now no damnation," as the older version used to run, "to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that hath risen again." The dreadful gates of hell shall never be passed by a soul that believeth in Christ Jesus; for us there is no undying worm, for us no unquenchable fire, for us no wrath to come. Glory be to God for this amazing grace.

But next, he has also delivered us from the pit of sinfulness, to my mind as horrible a pit as hell itself, indeed under some aspects it is the same thing, for sinfulness is hell, and to live under the power of sin is to be condemned. Well, brethren, years ago sinfulness was our master, and we loved it; we hated the ways of God and loved the wages of unrighteousness; but at this present moment, although we mourn because we are not perfectly rid of sin, yet sin shall not have dominion over us. We see sin in our nature, but we loathe it; it is no more a home-born citizen of our soul, but an alien to be expelled, an outlaw to be hunted down. No more do we consent to sin; "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Blessed be God, although we are sometimes brought into captivity to the body of this death, yet he giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are driving out the Canaanites of sin, little by little by force of arms and by the might of grace, and soon shall every Jericho fall flat to the ground, and every Amorite be slain. Let us rejoice in being delivered from this pit of corruption.

Equally hath the Lord delivered us at this time from the awful consciousness of wrath under which we once groaned. Brethren, you have not forgotten the time when you felt the hand of God heavy upon you

under conviction of sin. I do not know what the pangs of damned souls may be, but I think I have been almost able to guess their horror, in my hours of deep distress, when my soul chose strangling rather than life because of my misery, for I was drunken with wormwood and filled with sore anguish. This I know, that if my horror could have been greater my life must have expired. It is not always that awakened souls suffer so much, but any man who hath felt his own sinfulness hath seen that which might make every individual hair upon his head stand upright with horror, since to be a sinner is the most dreadful thing conceivable. To have God's wrath revealed in the spirit is to have a seething hell within one's conscience. But, blessed be his name, he has loved us out of that pit of despair. No longer are we burdened with a sense of sin, for we are pardoned; our conscience is purged from dead works: the precious blood has made us happy in God; we are reconciled to him by the death of his Son, and all our iniquities are forgiven for ever. Therefore our heart is glad in the Lord, and to him will we sing our songs upon our stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord.

- In a dungeon deep he found me,
Without water, without light,
Bound in chains of horrid darkness,
Gloom, thick Egyptian night:
He recovered

Thence my soul with price immense.

• And for this let men and angels,
All the heavenly hosts above,
Choirs of seraphims elected,
With their golden harps of love,
Praise and worship
My Redeemer without end."

Since that first dark hour of conviction I dare say you have passed through other fearful depressions of spirit, very similar to this which is recorded of Hezekiah. You have not descended quite so deep into the pit as you did at the first, but yet you have known bitter sorrows and have been delivered from them. Are you this morning happy in the Lord? Are you again rejoicing? Then say with the king,—“Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments in the house of the Lord.”

There cometh speedily a time when we shall sing this song more sweetly in a better land than this, where there shall be none of these mists to hang about us, but changeless, everlasting noonday without a cloud. In heaven how sweetly shall we sing this song upon our stringed instruments, when there shall be no corruption left in us, but we shall be pure as the soul of God himself, perfect as Christ our Redeemer. What hymns of gratitude shall we chant before the throne, when standing on the heights of heaven we gaze into the deeps of hell; when from our perfection we remember the fall and all the ruin of it from which almighty grace uplifted us! Glory be unto the Lord for ever, for “In love to my soul thou hast delivered it from the pit of corruption.”

“Allelujah! This is the deed which grace has done.

Now, we have to notice *the power which performed it*. To my mind the truth herein set forth is the delicious food for meditation, but it is not readily to be brought forth in preaching. Hear ye the words—"Thou hast loved my soul out of the pit of corruption." Love wrought the rescue. Love did it all; let love wear the crown. I was asleep in my sin, but thou, O love, didst arouse me with a kiss. Only when I began to hear that Jesus loved poor souls unto the death, and therefore came to seek and save sinners, did I begin to wake from my deadly lethargy. Do you, my brethren, recollect when the first thought entered into your minds that after all there was hope, for God was full of love? Did not that thought bestir you? Did not the Lord love you out of the sleep of sin? Moreover, you loved sin, and the wages of it, and the world looked very pleasantly upon you while it enthralled you: at last you came to know that the love of God was sweeter far than the love of sin, you had a glimpse of Jesus' dear marred visage, all bedewed with spittle and with blood, and he appeared so much more fair and lovely than your sin that you began to feel that sin and you must part. Thus the Lord loved you out of your love of sin. His sweet love made sin nauseous to you, you were weary of it, and would have no more of it. Do you recollect that when you fell into despair and said, "I have been such a sinner that I must die in my sin," you were uplifted from the pit of unbelief? I know that I was borne out of it upon the eagle wings of love. The Lord loved me out of it; he shed abroad such love in my soul that I could not be an unbeliever any longer. Just as an iceberg must surely melt when once it is borne along by the Gulf Stream, so my unbelief was compelled to dissolve in the warm stream of his dear love. Believe him? How could I disbelieve him when I saw his love to sinners, and heard of his death for the very chief of them, even for such as I was. He loved me out of my unbelief. But then I felt so weak I could do nothing; I was afraid to unite with his people, and afraid to make confession of my faith for fear I should dishonour him. Then he came and loved me out of my timorousness, shed his love abroad in my heart so powerfully that I became strong with strength of his giving, and knew myself to be safe because I was in his keeping. Then did I come forward and confess his name and unite with his saints, for I felt that I could trust my Lord to keep me even unto the end, for his love had loved me out of my weakness. I am telling the story as though it were about myself, but, brother, I mean it about you as well, you have wandered sometimes since then, you have gone away from your Lord into worldliness and much that you unfeignedly deplore; and who is it that has led you back to peace and holiness? Who has been the Good Shepherd and restored your soul? My loving Lord has driven me back sometimes with sharp words of rebuke, but oftener he has loved me back with attractive tenderness. What a wonderful magnet love is! It draws our iron hearts to itself. Its sway is kindly but irresistible. We wander hither and thither, in the instability of our minds, till a memory of the days of love comes over our spirit, and straightway we can rest no longer in the things of earth after which we have so wickedly gone astray, but we say, "I will return unto my first husband, for it was better with me then than now." A moment's memory of the days of our espousals makes the

heart sick with longings to return to her home in the bosom of Jesus. He loves us out of our backslidings. Perhaps you have fallen into lukewarmness, and are chilly and lifeless, and what is the way to raise you out of that horrible state? Is it not a way of love? When the Laodicean church was neither cold nor hot, and even her Beloved was ready to spue her out of his mouth, how was she bidden to rise out of her condition? Did not the Lord say, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Christ's coming to commune with the church was the cure of her indifference. When the love of God is shed abroad in the soul you feel no longer sleepy and indifferent, but your spirit girds herself with zeal as with a cloak, and your heart glows with vehement flames of affection. How truly does our poet sing—

"O Jesu, King most wonderful,
Thou Conqueror renown'd,
Thou sweetness most ineffable,
In whom all joys are found!

When once thou visitest the heart,
Then truth begins to shine,
Then earthly vanities depart,
Then kindles love divine."

The ever-gracious Lord means to perfect that which concerneth you by the action of this self-same love. His gentleness has made you great, and his love will make you glorious. Divine love is the most sanctifying agency in the world; it is that which checked us before we knew the Lord when we ran so greedily after sin, and it is that which constrains us now that we live unto his name, for "the love of Christ constraineth us." Behold then the love of the Spirit! Is not this most blessed medicine? We spoke of bitter draughts under our first head, and truly these have their virtue, but here the Lord's love uses medicine like itself; yea, it becomes itself the medicine, and the Lord seems to say, "Here is my dear child sick, and I will restore him by giving him more love." Divine love is a *catholicon*, a universal medicine. No spiritual disease can resist its healing power. The love and blood of Jesus, applied by the Holy Ghost, will raise up the saints from pining sickness and restore them from the gates of the grave. No heart, however like to granite it becomes, can long resist almighty love. The rebel may stand up in bold defiance, and stand out in daring obstinacy, but when he begins to feel God loves him he cries,

"Lord, thou hast won, at length I yield;
My heart, by mighty grace compell'd,
Surrenders all to thee;
Against thy terrors long I strove,
But who can stand against thy love?
Love conquers even me.

If thou hadst bid thy thunders roll,
And lightnings flash, to blast my soul,
I still had stubborn been;
But mercy has my heart subdued,
A bleeding Saviour I have view'd,
And now I hate my sin."

We must briefly notice *the modus operandi of this love*. "Thou hast embraced my soul out of the pit of corruption." Yonder is the child in the pit, and the father wishing to save it, goes down into the pit and embraces his beloved one, and so brings him up to life and safety again. After this manner did Jesus save us. He embraced us by taking our nature, and so becoming one with us. It is by embraces that he regenerates converts and sanctifies us, for he comes into union with us by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. All our lives he communes with us and embraces us with arms of mighty love, and so uplifts us from the pit of corruption. In this way also he will bring us right up out of our fallen estate into perfection of holiness, by continuing the divine embrace, pressing us nearer, and nearer, and nearer still to his dear, loving heart, till all sin shall be pressed out of us. He will by one eternal embrace of unchanging love lift us out of the pit of corruption into a state of absolute perfection wherein we shall dwell with him for ever. Glory be unto God for all this. He who has tasted of this cannot but sing as Hezekiah did upon his stringed instruments all the days of his life in the house of the Lord.

III. We have now with much delight to consider the promise of ABSOLUTE PARDON. "For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." This king Hezekiah mentions as the cause of his restored peace and health. He could not be healed and cheered till the cause of disease was gone, and that was sin. Sin was the foreign element in his spiritual constitution, and as long as it was there it caused fret and worry and spiritual disease; but when the sin was gone then health and peace came back. Now let me take the words before us and set them forth in a few brief sentences, and bid you notice, first, *the burden—sin*. A heavy load, a weighty curse. Observe *the owner of this burden*: Hezekiah says, not sin only, but *my sin*. If any sins in the world are heavier than others they are mine. Brother, you feel yours to be so, do you not? Then take the next word, which is a word of multitude and note *the comprehensiveness* of that burden. *All my sins*. "Thou hast cast all my sins." Let us spell that word, *ALL my sins*. What a row of figures it would take to number them all; as to the record of them, surely it would reach round the sky,—*all my sins*. In what balance shall they be weighed? What must the wrath be which is due to me on account of them? Think long and humbly of the words—*all my sins*.

Now, see *the Lord comes to deal with them!* He takes them all, and what does he do? He casts them. "Thou hast cast all my sins." What a deed of omnipotence! What a divine cast! None but Jehovah Jesus himself could even have lifted all my sins, but he did lift them, and, like another Atlas, he bore them upon his shoulders; and having done that even till he sweat great drops of blood and bled to death, he then took the whole mass of my sins and cast them as far as the east is from the west; nay more, he cast them behind Jehovah's back. Where is that? Behind God's back; where can that be? Men throw things behind their back when they cannot bear the sight of them. Our sin is loathsome and abominable to God, he will not look upon it, and so he casts it behind his back. But then he is a just God, and he must punish iniquity; it must come before the eye of his holiness to be avenged. We have not, therefore, seen as yet the full meaning of

the passage. No, it means that the Lord becomes oblivious of his people's sins. Somebody said the other day concerning a certain piece of business, "I shall never think of it again; it is gone as though it had never been." The Lord means all that concerning his people's sins: "I shall never think of them again, they are quite gone as far as I am concerned, I have thrown them where I shall never see them any more, their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." What a gracious mode of pardoning sin! God himself passes an act of oblivion and declares, "I will not remember their sins." He looks upon his people who have been so provoking, and are still so prone to sin, and yet he beholds no iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel. He sees his people washed in the blood of the Lamb, robed in the righteousness which is in God by faith, and he beholds in them neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, for he has cast their sins so far away that they are out of sight of omniscience and out of mind of omnipresence. Again, I would remind you of the words, "behind thy back." Where is that? All things are before God's face: he looketh on all the works of his hands, and he seeth all things that exist. Behind his back! It must mean annihilation, non-existence, and non-entity. O my soul, thy God has flung thy sin into non-entity, and effectually made an end of it: he treats thee as though it never had been, and far as his justice is concerned through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, it is to the Lord as though we had never transgressed at all. "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

I do not think I need preach any longer upon this subject. Go home and turn it over in quiet meditation under the overshadowing of the divine Spirit. Dear child of God, endeavour to get a grip of this great privilege of perfect pardon, and never let it go. May the Holy Ghost seal it home to you. You are right in bringing your sins before your own face and mourning over them; that is where they should be, but do not at the same time forget that they are forgiven. When a man casts his sins behind his back God will put them before his face: but when in penitence a believer sets his sins before his own face to mourn over them then the Lord in mercy declares that he will cast them behind his back. Oh believer in Jesus, thy sin is gone for ever. Be thou restful, happy, secure, for thou art accepted in the Beloved. Thy sin has ceased to be. The longest lines can never reach the bottom of that sea into whose depths Jehovah has cast them; the utmost industry of the devil can never travel into that land which does not exist, even the land which lies behind Jehovah's back, into which he has cast thy sin. Who would not be a believer in Jesus? Even if he were sore sick, and had to lie like Hezekiah, on the bed of death, who would not be a believer? Even though he had to cry out *Marah, Marah*, bitterness twice over, who would not be a believer, and be embraced out of his misery by that mighty love which abolishes the sin of the penitent? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, O sinner, and this shall be thy portion also by God's abundant mercy. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xxxviii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—103, 243, 233.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WORK FOR JESUS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."—Matthew xxi. 28. *May 6th 1877.*

I AM not going to confine myself to the connection of these words, nor to use them strictly after the manner in which they were first spoken. I may, perhaps, explain the parable very briefly at the close; but I take leave to withdraw these words from their immediate context, and use them as a voice which, I believe, sounds often in the ears of God's people, and sometimes sounds in vain.—"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." It is certain that God still speaks to us. He has spoken to us in his word. There are his precepts and promises; his statutes and testimonies. He that hath ears to hear let him hear these sacred oracles. But beside this open revelation there are counsels and rebukes more closely and personally addressed to the conscience; voices—soft sometimes as whispers, at other times loud as the thunders that pealed from Sinai. The Lord has a way of speaking to men when "he openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction," as Elihu said. Thus he speaks when he calls them effectually by his grace in conversion. So he once called "Samuel, Samuel," till the child answered. So he said, "Matthew, follow me." So he called out, "Zaccheus, come down." So he cried out, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" So he bid some of us till the divine accents were clear and irresistible. In like manner we have, many of us, heard him say, "Son, give me thy heart;" and we have given him our hearts: we could do no otherwise. That voice exerted such a charming spell and swayed us with such a divine power that we were subdued by it, and we yielded our hearts to the God of love. Since then you who know the Lord must often have heard a voice speaking to you and bidding you seek his face in prayer. Perhaps you have been busy with the world, but you found an impulse of a mysterious kind coming over you, and you have been fain to withdraw yourself for a few minutes to the closet that you might speak with God. You know how it has been when you have been meditating alone, and yet not alone. One whose presence you knew, whose face you could not see, was with you. You felt as if you must pray. It has not been any effort on your part. The exercise has been as easy as

to breathe and as pleasant as to partake of your daily bread. You felt the Lord drawing you to the mercy-seat and saying in your soul, "My son, ask what thou wilt and it shall be done unto thee." You must have been conscious of such a voice as that.

And have you not at times, in the silence of your mind, heard the Lord call you to a closer communion with himself? Has not the sense, if not the words, of the spouse in the canticle been heard in your soul,— "Come, my beloved, let us see if the vines flourish. Come with me from Lebanon my spouse, with me from Lebanon"? You have been up and away. You have gone into the secret places where Christ has shown you his love, till you sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit has been sweet to your taste. Our experience makes us know that there are heavenly voices that invite prayer and call to communion. And probably some of you have also been conscious of another voice which I earnestly desire we may all hear to-night, namely, the more martial and stirring call to service for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of you have been obedient to the call these many years, and it calls louder and louder and louder still. You have been reaping, and bearing the heat and burden of the day, but you cannot throw down your sickle, your hand cleaves to it. Yea, rather do you take more gigantic strides and sweep down more of the precious corn at every stroke you take. You feel that you can never cease from it till you do

"Your body with your charge lay down,
And cease at once to work and live."

A voice divine seems calling thee and saying, "Follow me, and I will make thee a fisher of men. Behold I have made thee a chosen vessel to bear my name unto the Gentiles." You have heard that voice, and you are striving to obey it more and more.

Others either have never heard it, or hearing it have forgotten it. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear, and there are some who have a very deaf ear to any admonitions of this kind. They are like Issachar—a strong ass crouching down between two burdens, but yet lifting neither. I fear lest upon them should come the curse of Meroz, because they come not "to the help of the Lord—to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Now, mayhap this evening there are some Christian men or women here that shall feel as if the hand of the Crucified were laid upon them, and they hear him say to them, "Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price; wherefore glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are his. Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

The text, I hope, may be blest of God to be such a voice as that. Listening to it, we notice four things. First, *the character under which it calls us*, "Son"; secondly, *the service to which it calls us*, "go work"; thirdly, *the time for which it calls us*, "go work to-day"; and fourthly, *the place to which it directs us*, "go work to-day in my vineyard."

I. First, then, **THE CHARACTER UNDER WHICH IT CALLS US.**

It appears to me to be a very powerful selection of terms. "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." It puts work on a very gracious footing, when we are bidden to work for the Lord, not as slaves, nor as mere servants, but as sons. Moses speaks to us, and he says, "Servant, go

and work for thy wages." But the Father in Christ speaks to us, and he says, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." No more as a servant, but as a son, shalt thou serve the Lord. The returning prodigal said, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." That was not an evangelical prayer, and was not answered. The father said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again," and so he received him, not as a hired servant at all, but as a son. Oh, dear people of God, I trust you always draw the distinction very clearly between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. When you work for God you do not work *for* life but *from* life. You do not try to serve Christ in order that you may be saved, but because you are saved. You do not obey his commands that you may become his children, but because you are his children, and therefore are imitators of God as dear children. You say "Abba, Father," because you feel the spirit of adoption within you, and you endeavour to obey the commands of your Father for the self-same reason. I do not, therefore, say to anyone here, "Go and work for God that you may be saved." I would not venture to put it on that footing. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But turning to those who are saved, the gospel exhortation is put after a gospel sort—"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

And it has all the more strength on this account, because, in addressing us as sons, it reminds us of the great love which has made us what we are. We were by nature heirs of wrath even as others, but, beloved, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Think of the love which chose us when we were still aliens and enemies; the love which adopted us, and put us into the family, itself wondering while it did it, for the Lord is represented as saying, "How shall I put thee among the children?"—as if it were a strange thing that such as we are should ever be numbered among the children of God. The love which adopted us did not stay there, but having given us the rights of children, it gave us the nature of children, wherefore we were regenerated—"Begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." Now, just think of election, adoption, regeneration, and when the Lord addresses you by that term of "son," think of all that and say, "I owe to God an immeasurable debt of gratitude for having enabled me to become his son: giving me power and privilege to become a child of God. Therefore do I feel the claims of obligation, and I would endeavour to work in the vineyard because I am his child, his son, his daughter, made so by his grace."

This you see, dear friends, engages us to work in the vineyard all the more cogently, because we may reflect not only on the grace which has made us sons, but on the privileges which that same grace bestowed upon us in making us sons; for, if children of God, the Lord will provide for us, will clothe us, will heal us, will protect us, will guide us, will educate us, will make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Remember, too, that precious passage, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." If heirs of God, how large is our inheritance, and if joint heirs with Christ how sure that inheritance

is; and we have been brought now, beloved, to such an estate as this that the angels themselves might envy us, for I venture to apply a passage of Scripture to this case—I hope without wresting it—“Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son?” But he speaks thus to us poor worms of the dust, and when he is bidding us serve him he comes to us under this character, and addresses us in this relationship, and he says, “Son, daughter, go work to-day in my vineyard. I have given thee privileges boundless in making thee my child. I have given thee this world and worlds to come. Earth is thy lodge, and heaven thy home. And therefore, because I have done all this for thee—and what could I have done more for thee than have made thee my child?—therefore I say, Go, work to-day in my vineyard.”

In appealing thus to us under the name of son, it is supposed that we have some feelings within us correspondent to the condition to which our heavenly Father has called us. He says, “son.” If any of you, being a son, hath a father, and if that father wished you to do something for him, and he addressed you as “my son,” you would feel at once that whatever you could do you were bound to do because you were a son. It would awaken in you the filial feeling which is swift at once to yield obedience and love. And when the Lord looks upon thee, my brother, and says to thee “Son,” it is supposed that there is in thy heart a child’s nature given by his grace, and that this filial instinct prompts the quick response, “My Father, what dost thou say to me? Speak, Lord, speak, Father, for thy son heareth thee. I long to do thy will. I delight in it, for to me it is the greatest joy I know that thou art my Father and my God. Therefore, Lord, my heart stands ready now to listen to whatever thou hast to say, and my hand is ready to do it, as thy grace shall enable me, only strengthen me in thy ways.” Son, daughter, go work to-day in my vineyard.

By the use of that term “son,” also, it is supposed that you have something of the qualification that will fit you to do what he bids you. A man who has a vineyard naturally supposes that his son knows something about vineyards. The boy will have learned something through his sire, and you that know the Lord are the only people that can serve him in his vineyard—that is to say, in winning souls for Christ none can do this but those who are won themselves. If there be a lost child to be reclaimed, he shall be brought in by one of the children who has himself been found. Unto the wicked God saith, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?” but to you who are his sons and daughters he entrusts the gospel, putting you in trust with it that you may bear it to others and bring others to know and love his name. Oh, dear friends, it must be a dreadful thing to be trying to save the souls of others while you yourselves are lost; and what an unhappy mortal must he be who has to preach the gospel that he never knew—to tell of promises that he has never believed, and to preach a Christ in whom his soul has never trusted! But when the Lord speaks to you as his son and his daughter, the very fact that you stand in that relationship to him proves that you have some qualification for the service; and, therefore, dear brother or sister, you must not back out of it. You must not wrap your talent in a napkin, for you have got some talent in the very fact of being a child of God—a son or daughter of the Most High.

Thus have I tried to open up the character to whom the Lord speaks, but I cannot do it so as to interest those who are not his people. But I do say this to those of you who are a people near unto him, to whom he stands as a Father, that this fact has strong claims upon you. If I be a Father, where is my honour? If ye be my children, where is your fear? If indeed the Lord has put you into his family, do you not owe to him the obedience and the love of children, and what can be more natural than that if there be a household work to do—vineyard work to do—your Father should look to you to do it, and turn to you whom he has loved so long and loved so well, and say, "Son, daughter, go work to-day in my vineyard"?

II. Well, now, secondly, let us turn to the next point, and that is, **THE SERVICE TO WHICH THE LORD CALLS US—"Go work."**

I know some Christians who do not like the name of work, and they look very black in the face if you say anything about duty. As for the matter of that, I do not mind how black they look, because there are some people who very much expose their own disposition by black looks and sullen moods; and when they turn sour they only manifest what is in their own nature. He that quarrels with the precept quarrels with God. Let him mind that. And he that does not like the practical part of Christianity may do what he likes with the doctrinal part of it, for he has neither part nor lot in this matter. The language of the true child of God is, "I delight myself in thy precepts"; and, as David put it, "Thy precepts have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage." He would even sing about the precepts of the gospel. And now the text says, "Go work." That is something practical, something real. Go work. He does not say, "My son, go and think and speculate, and make curious experiments, and fetch out some new doctrines and astonish all thy fellow creatures with whims and oddities of thine own." "My son, go work." And he does not here say, "My son, go and attend conferences one after another all the year round and live in a perpetual maze of hearing different opinions and going from one public meeting and one religious engagement to another, and so feed thyself on the fat things full of marrow." All this is to be attended to in its proper proportion, but here it is "Go work: go work." How many Christians there are that seem to read, "Go plan;" and they always figure in a way with some wonderful plan for the conversion of all the world, but they are never found labouring to convert a baby—never having a good word to say to the tiniest child in the Sunday-school. They are always scheming, and yet never effecting anything. But the text says, "My son, go work." Oh, yes, but those who do not like to work themselves display the greatness of their talents in finding fault with those who do work, and a very clear perception they have of the mistakes and the crotchets of the very best of workers, whose zeal and industry are alike unflagging. Howbeit the text does not say, "My son, go and criticize;" what it distinctly says, is, "Go and work." I remember that when Andrew Fuller had a very severe lecture from some Scotch Baptist brethren about the discipline of the church, he made the reply, "You say that your discipline is so much better than ours. Very well, but discipline is meant to make good soldiers. Now, my soldiers fight better than yours, and I think therefore that you ought not to say much about my discipline." So the

real thing is not to be for ever calculating about modes of church government, and methods of management and plans to be adopted and rules to be laid down, which it shall be accounted a serious breach to violate. All well in their place, for order is good in its way. But come, now, let us go to work. Let us have something done. I believe the very best working for God is often done in a very irregular manner. I get more and more to feel like the old soldier of Waterloo when he was examined about the best garment that could be worn by a soldier. The Duke of Wellington said to him, "If you had to fight Waterloo over again how would you like to be dressed?" The answer was, "Please, sir, I should like to be in my shirt-sleeves." I think that is about the best. Get rid of everything superfluous, and get at it and hack away. I would to God that some Christians could do that, just strip to it, get rid of the superfluities of orderliness and propriety, and everything else which hampers them in trying to get back poor souls. There they are, going down to hell, and we are stickling about this mode and that, and considering the best way not to do it, and appointing committees to consider and debate, to adjourn and to postpone, and to leave the work in abeyance. The best way is to arise and do it, and let the committee sit afterwards. God grant we may. My son, go *work* to-day. Let it be something practical, something real, something actually done.

And by good work is meant something that will involve effort, toil, earnestness, self-denial, perhaps something that will want perseverance. In right earnest you will need to stick to it. You will have heartily to yield yourself up to it, and give up a good deal else that might hinder you in doing it. Oh, Christian men and women, you will not glorify God much unless you really put your strength into the ways of the Lord, and throw your body, soul, and spirit—your entire manhood and womanhood—into the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To do this you need not leave your families, or your shops, or your secular engagements. You can serve God in these things. They will often be vantage grounds of opportunity for you, but you must throw yourself into it. A man does not win souls to Christ while he is himself half asleep. The battle that is to be fought for the Lord Jesus must be fought by men who are wide awake and quickened by the Spirit of God. "My son, go work to-day." Do not go and play at teaching in Sunday-schools. Do not go and play the preacher. Do not go and play at exhorting people at the corners of streets, or even play at giving away tracts. "My son, go work." Throw thy soul into it. If it is worth doing it is worth doing well; and if it is worth doing well, it is worth doing better than you have ever done it yet; and even then it will be worth doing better still, for when you have done your best you have still to reach forward to a something far beyond; for the best of the best is all too little for such a God and for such a service. "My son, go work."

Well, now, such a claim as this may, perhaps, you think, sound rather hard; but I could tell you of many who would be very glad indeed if the Lord would say that to them. I might tell you of some who seldom leave their couches, some who can seldom sit upright through their weakness, to whom the nights are often full of pain, and the days are spent in weariness. They have learned, by God's teaching, to be content to

suffer; but sometimes they cannot stifle an ardent wish; they wish the Lord would let them serve him. They do not envy, but yet there sometimes crosses over their mind the shadow of something like envy when they recollect what opportunities some of you have, who are full of health and strength. I have seen my brother minister laid aside, the voice perhaps gone, the lungs feeble, the heart prone to palpitate, and, oh, how he has wished that he could preach. With what fervour has he said, "Oh, if I had but those opportunities over again, how I would try to use them better than when I was favoured with them! I tell you there are thousands of God's servants who would kiss the dust of his feet if he would only say to them, "Go work." I remember reading of a minister who had been labouring in America till he had fairly broken down. He had to take a tour for his health. He had not been away many days before he wrote in his diary, "There may be some ministers who count it a pleasure to be relieved from the duty of preaching, but I count it a misery. I would sooner preach as I have done in my own pulpit continually than I would see all the kingdoms of the world." And, indeed, there is no pleasure in the world like that of serving God. You will soon get tired if you have a vacation, but you will never get tired of a divine vocation, though you may sometimes grow tired in it. Now, think that the Lord might have said to you, "Now, go and lie on that bed for ten years. Go and pine away in consumption. I have nothing much for you to do. You have got to bear my will." Are you not very glad that you are full of strength, or that you have some share of it, and that now your heavenly Father says, "Son, go work. I have given you strength: go work"? Lord, we thank thee for so kind and gentle a command.

Besides, there is a great deal of honour in this work. You know how much your little boy wants to be a man. All boys do. When he first wears stick-up collars he congratulates himself upon the sign of anything like being a man. How proud he is of it! And if you, being a father, were to say to your boy, "My son, you are now of such an age that I can trust you to do some work for me"; see how the little man would begin to lift himself up: he is glad of it. And I am sure that if we look at it rightly, we who are the children of God ought to feel honoured by our heavenly Father saying to us, "You may do something for me." We must be very humble, for, after all, we cannot do anything except as he worketh in us to will and to do. But it is really very gratifying and ennobling to a poor mortal spirit to be allowed to do anything for God, ay, and to do what perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do; for oh, dear brother, there is no glorified spirit that can go down that back street and up that blind alley, and up those staircases that seem as if they would tumble down under your feet. Go and talk to that dying woman about Christ. You have a privilege which honoured Gabriel has not got: be thankful that you have it. There is no angel that can take that little child in the Sunday-school class and tell it of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and carry the little lamb for the Good Shepherd. The Lord sends you to do it. And it should be a point of thankfulness with us all that he has counted us worthy, and put us into the ministry—into any part or parcel of that ministry—to do something for his name's sake. Well, we are always

receiving—always receiving, and it is very blessed; but still in this, as in other things, it is more blessed to give than to receive; and when we can give back to God some little trifle of service, stained with our tears because it is no better than it is, oh, it is a happy and a blessed thing. How grateful you ought to be that the Lord does say to you, "Son, go work to-day."

And remember, once more, on this point, that the work to which the Lord calls us is very varied, therefore there is a great deal of change in it; and, besides that, it suits the different temperaments, constitutions, dispositions, and abilities of his people. He says, "My son, go work to-day in my vineyard." But he does not give you to do my work, and he does not give me to do your work. Dear sister, you would like to do the work of such and such an excellent Christian woman, would not you? Yes, but that is naughty of you. Be satisfied to do your own. Suppose your housemaid always wanted to do the cook's work, the house would soon be in bad order. Better keep to your own place, dear sister. Ah, there is a brother here who says, "I think I could preach if I only had such and such a congregation." Very likely, brother, but you had better preach to your own and do what good you can there. Very likely I should do better with my own congregation, and you will do better with yours than I should. Every man had better keep to his own work in his own place. And how thankful we ought to be that if one can preach a sermon, yet another can offer a prayer,—that if one can go and speak to thousands, yet another can speak to ones and twos. There is work in the school; there is work in the family; there is work in the street; there is work in the workshop; there is work everywhere for Jesus if thou wilt but stretch out thy hand to find it and follow Solomon's good advice, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

III. Now, **THE TIME** is the next thing. "My son, go work *to-day*." That means directly—now.

Brother, sister, I will not say a word about what it is your duty to do to-morrow. Let the morrow take care of itself. I will have nothing to say about what it will be right for you to do in ten years' time. If you are alive, grace will be given to you for that. But what I have to say to you in God's name is, "Go work to-day," and as the sun has gone down, let it be, "Go work to-night in my vineyard," if there be opportunity, even to-night, ere another day's sun has dawned upon the world. "And why to-day?" Because, brother, thy Father wants thee to be at it at once. "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" If thou hast done nothing for Christ thou hast wasted enough time. Do not rest to-day, but be at it now. He wants thee to do it now, because the vines are in a certain condition that just now require work. There is somebody in the world who is in a tender state of mind, to whom thou mayest speak successfully. There is a mourner here who wants comfort to-night. There is one struggling against his conscience, who wants urging on to-night in the right way. If the case be neglected to-night it will be like neglecting to trim the vines just at the proper time for taking away the superfluous wood. Now canst thou do it. Thou canst not do it on any other day. Therefore, "go work to-day."

"To-day," because there are certain dangers to which those whom

thou art about to bless are just now exposed. The devil is tempting them : it is needful that thou go and help them against that temptation. They are just now in despair ; it is needful that thou step in with the word of comfort from thy Master's mouth. They are, perhaps, this very night, before they go to their rest, about to commit a great sin. Mayhap the Lord means thee to interpose just now, ere that sin be done. Son, go work to-day ; thou art wanted. There are very few labourers just now : many of them have gone. Son, do thou go to-day, while the others have gone out for their recreation—while the others are asleep and grown idle. There is a gap just now : it is at this moment. Many a brave deed of valour owed its success to being done at once. If Horatius had not kept the bridge just in that same moment when the enemy endeavoured to pass over, we should never have heard of him, nor of the brave deeds of old. There is a time of dearth—of want : there is an urgency. Son, God saith to thee, "Haste thee now, even now, and go work to-day in my vineyard." "To-day : " mark that.

It means work all the day : work as long as ever you live. Son, if once thou get into that vineyard do not come home again until the day is done. I am always sorry when I hear of Christian people beginning to give up some of their work before the infirmities of old age come on ; although I think that many a minister, when he gets old, had better give up a charge for which he is not equal and take one smaller for which his strength would avail. But I know that some give up this work and that, and they say, "Let the young people come and take their turn." Yes, yes, but suppose the sun were to stop shining and say, "There is a star over there ; let him have a turn and shine instead of me." Suppose the moon were for ever to give up shining in the night watches, and say that she has had enough of being out at night ; and suppose the earth were to say it has had enough of yielding harvests. "Why should I yield any more ? Let the sea take its turn and grow corn." And so, dear Christian friends, keep on as long as you can. Who can blame dear old John Newton ? When he got too feeble to get up the pulpit stairs of St. Mary Woolnoth, he was helped up, and then, leaning on his pulpit Bible he poured out his soul. A friend of his said to him, "Dear Mr. Newton, don't you think you ought to give up preaching ?" "What !" said he, "shall the old African blasphemer ever give up praising the grace of God as long as there is breath in his body ? Never." And so he went to his work again. Oh, for more of that spirit to persevere in the Master's service.

Only there is this thought : it is only a day. "Son, go work to-day." } <
It will only be a day. The longest life is no more, and then the shadows of death will gather : but there will be no night, for instead thereof the day shall break and the shadows shall flee away, and then life's service here below will all be over. There will be no troublesome children to teach, no hard-hearted sinners to rebuke, no backsliding, lukewarm Christians to reprove, no deceivers to encounter, no sceptics to answer with the testimony that cannot be shaken, no scoffers to put up with, patiently bearing their contumely. It will be all over then ; and then shall those who have served their Master behold him gird himself and sit down and serve them, and they shall feast at his table and enter into his joy. "My son, go work to-day," for thou shalt rest to-morrow. Work

on, for there is rest enough in heaven : work on, for eternity shall well repay thee for the toils of time.

IV. Then ; as to THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD CALLS US TO THE WORK. "My son, go work to-day in *my vineyard*."

I like to think of this special sphere of labour, because it must be a pleasure to work in our Father's vineyard, for there everything that we do will be done for him. I trim this vine ; it is my Father's vine. I dig this trench ; but it is my Father's ground I turn. I gather out these stones ; it is my Father's vineyard that I am engaged in clearing. I repair this fence ; it is my Father's soil that I am thus hedging about. It is all done for him. Who would not do all that he could for the dear Redeemer, dying Lamb, and for the blessed Father of our spirits ? "Go work to-day in my vineyard."

Then what interesting work it is, for it is our own vineyard because it is our Father's vineyard. All that belongs to him belongs to us. We are sons working in our Father's vineyard ; so we can say, "This vine ; why, I have an interest in it, for I am the heir of my Father's property. This ground that I endeavour to dig about and manure ; it is my ground, it is my Father's. And this wall that I try to mend ; it is mine, it is my Father's." It is always pleasant to work for ourselves, you know ; and, in a blessed sense, when we are working for God we are working for ourselves. Ye are labourers, ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's people ; and when ye are working for the Lord ye really are taking shares with him.

And what a work it is, too ! "Go work to-day in my vineyard." One likes working in a vineyard, because it pays. Working in a desert may be thankless toil ; but working in a vineyard where there will be clusters is very different. One can think already of those juicy grapes that will be ready for the winepress, and for the festival, when the ruddy juice comes freely forth—when they make merry and joy in the vintage. And you will have the new wine, and the wine on the lees well refined. All sorts of pleasures await the man who serves the Lord.

"Go work in my vineyard." Does it not mean that the work is plentiful ? There is always something to be done in a vineyard. If you ask those who keep vines they will tell you that there is much labour required. From one part of the year right on there is something still to be done, many dangers to be averted, and many enemies to be kept off from the vine ; so there is plenty to do, brother. Go work in the vineyard, where there will be need of all thy hands. It is close at hand ; hard by you ; for the heavenly Father did not say, "Son, take a ship and go to Tarshish, or to Ophir." He said, "My son, go work in my vineyard" ; and the vineyard was just out of the back door there. Now, your heavenly Father's vineyard is close to you. Those streets where you live—the very house in which you dwell—perhaps the very chamber in which you sleep—is God's vineyard, where you are to work for him. It is your heavenly Father's own work, to be done by you in your heavenly Father's own strength. Oh, if I might to-night set one young man on fire with love to Christ I should be glad. If I could but be the humble means of inspiring some Christian woman with the high mission of being useful in her day and generation, how much would my soul

rejoice ! There came into this Tabernacle one evening a young gentleman who was well known as being a great hand with his cricket bat. He was a Christian and full of earnestness in laying hold upon the great truths of revelation ; but he had never served his God. He thought it right to spend his leisure time in manly exercises, and in such pursuits he sought recreation. But while I spoke a fire kindled within him, and he went home to begin to preach the gospel in the street of the city where he lived, and now he is the pastor of a large and influential church which he has gathered together. Since then he has preached more than once in this place the gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh, that some other believer who may happen to be in that condition—some young man of ability who is spending all his strength on the world without going into anything grossly wrong, but simply wasting his talent—might hear a voice saying to him to-night, as he goes down that aisle, "My son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

After dwelling so long upon the practical admonition, I have but little time left for that brief explanation of the parable, or more properly the parables of the vineyard with which on the outset I promised to close. The occasion on which they were spoken is memorable. Assailed "*while he was teaching*,"—rudely interrupted by the legal sandedrim of the Jews with the high priest in the forefront, they confronted our Lord as it were with a warrant and propounded to him two questions ;—one as to the authority or title by which he acted—the other as to the source from which his authority was derived. You all know how skilfully he evaded his unscrupulous antagonists. "*I also will ask you one thing*," he said. Therewith he put to them a question that proved a poser, and left them to a ridiculous parley, for "*they reasoned among themselves*," went aside to whisper, and then drew back in sheer timidity declining an answer, for "*they feared the people*," or as you may read it, they were afraid of the mob. The advantage our Lord thus gained he quickly followed up with a parable—in fact, with the parable we have been talking about. He opened it thus,—"*What think ye ?*"—putting a query about two sons, the one forward in profession, yet utterly disobedient, the other sullen in appearance though afterwards penitent in spirit and diligent in labour. The thing was so obvious that they answer without hesitation with a reply that nailed the censure to their own breasts. "Whether of these twain did the will of his father ?" They say unto him, "the first." Read it, read the parable for yourselves. Realize the force of it if you can. The penitent harlot and the obdurate high priest are put in the scales. "*In the way of righteousness*"—according to the truthful caricature—the chief priests and elders themselves admit that "*the first*" of these twain did the will of our heavenly Father. Digest this parable, I pray you. Almost without a break the *vineyard* supplied him yet again with another parable which he insisted on their hearing—a parable that brought out the character of the dispensation and "the signs of the times" so distinctly, that they could not fail to read it in the light of their own prophets, and at the same time it so exposed the treachery of their counsel and conspiracy that they recognized their own portrait at once and perceived that he spake of them. "The vineyard," you are all aware, was the constant symbol of the Jewish nation as a theocracy.

The men that sat in Moses's seat were the stewards in charge of that vineyard which was Jehovah's special property. They, like the perverse rulers of every age, sought to shelter their evil designs under cover of syndicates and conferences. But the words and warnings of Jesus, his proverbs and parables, were keen enough to probe all their subtleties, and leave them to stand abashed without an excuse for the guile of their hearts or the guilt of their conduct. Now remember that the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. To what nation is it given? Is it not to the church which is called "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"? The vine is the express symbol of our Christian life, as all believers are incorporated with Christ. Well then, there is a vineyard of God's own planting; you believe that. He has let it out to husbandmen; you believe that. He will come seeking fruit of this vineyard; you believe that. You are, dear brethren, the children of the husbandmen; you believe that, or else you would not presume to sit at his table and drink of his cup. He says therefore to you, "Son, go work in my vineyard." What answer do you give with your lips? What answer do you give with your life?

Thus far I have not been speaking to unconverted people. I have not said a word to them. To them, however, I have this word to say, and I have done. I shall not ask you to work for Christ. I cannot exhort you to do anything for him. You are not in a state of mind to do it. You must first believe in him. Oh, let it be a sorrow to you to-night that you are incapable of serving Christ. Till you get a new heart and a right spirit you have no capacity to serve him. You have first to trust Christ, and to prove in your own souls that this gospel is the power of God to your salvation. Your eyes must be opened; you must be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that you may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Jesus, before you can do anything for him. Then, not till then, will ye be meet to be made witnesses both of those things which ye shall have seen and of those things in the which he will hereafter appear unto you. You must be born again yourselves before ye can travail in birth for others, till Christ be formed in them. You cannot testify, those of you by whom the testimony of Christ has not been received and in whom it is not confirmed. Your unskilled labour would be mischievous. Hands off such holy work till those hands have been washed clean by Jesus Christ. Come ye unto him, and trust him, and believe in him, and when he has saved you, then he will say to you, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xxi. 12—32.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23 (Vers. II.), 639.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

IDOLS ABOLISHED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?"—Hosea xiv. 8.

IDOLATRY was the great sin of the ten tribes represented by Ephraim: indeed, it is the sin of the entire human race. When we speak of idolatry we need not think of blocks of wood and stone, and black men bowing down before them; for our native land swarms with idolaters. Neither need you go into the streets to find them: stay where you are, and look into your own hearts, and you shall find idols there. This is the one easily besetting sin of our nature—to turn aside from the living God and to make unto ourselves idols in some fashion or another; for the essence of idolatry is this—to love anything better than God, to trust anything more than God, to wish to have a God other than we have, or to have some signs and wonders by which we may see him, some outward symbol or manifestation that can be seen with the eye or heard with the ear rather than to rest in an invisible God and believe the faithful promise of Him whom eye hath not seen nor ear heard. In some form or other this great sin is the main mischief in the heart of man; and even in saved men this is one of the developments of remaining corruption. We may very easily make an idol of anything, and in different ways. No doubt many mothers and fathers make idols of their children, and so many husbands and wives idolize each other, and we may even make idols of ministers, even as there were idol shepherds of old. Equally is it certain that many a thoughtful man makes an idol of his intellect, and many another makes an idol of his gold, or even of that little home wherein he enjoys so much content. The ignorant papist holds up his crucifix and worships that, and that is his idol; but men who are better instructed often take the Bible and read that, and failing to get through the letter into the spirit, they trust in the mere act of Scripture reading and make even the word itself to become an idol to them through their resting in a mere creed, or in bare Bible reading, and not pressing through it to spiritual hearty

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worship of God himself. Anything, however holy, which comes between us and the personal dealing of our soul with God, as he is revealed in Christ Jesus, by faith and love and hope, becomes an idol to us.

There are idols of all sorts, more or less intrinsically valuable. Just as in material substances one idol is made of wood and another of stone, and another of silver, and another of gold, so that these idols differ in value, and yet they are all idols, so may men, according to their different grades of mind, make an idol of this or of that or of the other, every man according to his own fancy. Many of these idols may in themselves be considered good enough, but when they are made into idols they are none the better for that. A golden idol is just as obnoxious to God as a wooden one; and so the dearest and best thing on earth, if it be allowed to come between us and God, as an idol, it becomes an abomination in the sight of the Most High. O brother, when you cannot trust the providence of God, but feel as if you must have something of visible substance to lean upon, you idolize your savings, or the money you covet. When you cannot take the bare promise, and dare not risk everything for God, but want something over and above the word of God to rest in, you idolize your own selfishness. When you must have marks and signs and evidences of the things which God has plainly declared, and will not believe God unless you have corroborative proof, you are playing the idolater's part. Yet human nature continually craves for more than God Allsufficient, because it is so carnal that it will not trust the Invisible One. It is, therefore, a supreme work of grace when God brings any man to say, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

I ask your attention to four points.

I. And the first is this: I want you to notice **THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THIS PREDICTION**. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?"

God speaks of Ephraim as if Ephraim would do and must do what he declared he should do. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" But who was this Ephraim? If we look at him as an individual he represents the ten tribes of Israel at the time when they were wedded to strange gods, Ephraim is a man, and therefore he has a will of his own; he is a depraved man, and therefore he has an obstinate will: and yet God speaks about Ephraim as positively as if he had no will, and states that he shall say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" It would be very hard to say what the wind shall do—very hard to say what the waves shall do; but man's will is more changeable and uncontrollable than the winds and the waves. Yet God speaketh as if Ephraim were absolutely in his hand, and he tells us what Ephraim shall say, and, in fact, what Ephraim shall feel. It is wonderful—is it not?—that God who knows human inconstancy and wilfulness, thus speaketh about the mind of man and declareth what he shall say and what he shall feel.

Now, in all this it is to be observed that there is no violation of the human will. Men are not blocks of wood: nor lumps of unconscious clay. God has made man a creature that wills and determines and judges for himself; and he deals with him as such. There are persons who seem to fancy that, whenever we speak of God as being omnipotent in the realm of mind, and speak of his declaring what men shall do and

feel, that we therefore deny free agency. By no manner of means. We are never prepared for the sake of one truth to deny another, and we do as heartily believe in free agency as we do in predestination. It has never been our custom to murder one truth in order to make room for another. There is room enough for two truths in the mind of the man who is willing to become as a little child. Yea, there is room in a teachable heart for fifty truths to live without contention.

God treats men as men, and as intelligent creatures. Having granted them power of judgment and will, he treats them as such, and he does not use that force upon the soul which it would be legitimate to use upon a piece of metal, if it had to be bored or to be melted, nor even such force as it is legitimate to use upon "an ox and an ass which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." No, no. Under heaven there is no man whose will God has ever violated. He has made the saved man's will all the freer by the constraints which grace has put upon it. Grace does not enchain the will, but frees the will; and when a man sincerely says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" though that speech be clean contrary to all the intent of his former life, yet he saith it with the full consent of his heart; nay, he never said anything more willingly than he says this, when God by divine power has "made him willing in the day of his power."

I wonder whether you are able to grasp, dear brethren, and lay hold of these two great truths—first, that man is made a creature responsible for all his actions, and a free agent, so constituted that God himself will not violate that free agency, and yet this other truth which we will maintain with all boldness—that God is as omnipotent in the region of mind and free agency as he is in the realm of mere matter. He looketh upon the hills and they smoke, he toucheth the earth and it trembles, the sea obeys him, and pauses where he bids it stay; yea, earthquake and tempest are entirely under his control. Nobody who believes in an omnipotent God doubts these things; but it is equally true that the dark understanding God enlightens with a flash of his Spirit, the iron sinew of the obstinate will God removes; as to the affections—when the heart is like stone, cold, dead, heavy, immovable, he has a way of turning the stone to flesh. He can do what he wills with men; and when his Spirit putteth forth all his power, though men may resist, yet there is a point beyond which resistance absolutely ceases, and the soul is led in joyful captivity to the conquering Spirit of the blessed God.

Now, somebody will again say, "But how do you make this consistent? You talk now contrary to the statements you made before." No, my dear brother, I do not so. They are both true; man is free, yet God is a sovereign in the world of free mind, working his own way, and speaking thus positively, without *if* or *but* or *an*. Know ye not that he will have his will, and man's will shall willingly bow to his will for he is Lord alone? Let me read you God's wills, God's wonderful wills, as they stand in this chapter, "*I will* heal their backsliding, *I will* love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. *I will* be as the dew unto Israel: he *shall* grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches *shall* spread, and his beauty *shall* be as the

olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. Ephraim *shall* say, What have I to do any more with idols?" God speaks about men as if they were absolutely puppets in his hand, and yet at the same time in other places he puts them upon their personal responsibility: both the doctrines are true. Be it not yours or mine to ask how they are to be reconciled, much less to cast either of the truths away, but let us hold them both fast, for these two shall be a clue through many a mystery of intricate doctrine, and lead us into the light of God on many a dark saying. I rejoice to hear the almighty Lord speak thus divinely of what man shall do, and I adore the amazing wisdom and power which can rule over free agents.

II. But now, secondly, in our text we see A MARVELLOUS CHANGE. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?"

Who is this Ephraim? Why, if you read the book of Hosea through you will find him turning up continually. Ephraim—Who was he? Who is this that says "What have I to do any more with idols?" I will tell you. It is that same Ephraim of whom the Lord had said "Let him alone: he is given unto idols."

This is different talk, is it not? At one time he is "glued" to his idols, for that is the word used in the original—glued to them as if he stuck to them and you could not get him away at all. Now here he is saying "What have I to do any more with them?" What a change it is! Is that the same man? Yes, the same man. But mark what the grace of God has done for him. See also how resolute he is. He speaks plainly and positively, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Is this the same man that we read of in a former chapter, "Ephraim is a silly dove without heart"? Yes, he was "a silly dove without heart," and now this same Ephraim is saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" speaking as if he had received a new, enlightened, bold, and decided heart. This is a change, is it not? The man who was glued to his idols and full of vacillation whenever better things came before him, is now clean separated from his former trusts, and made to hate them, and no longer vacillates and hesitates, but takes his stand and asks with glorious promptitude, "What have I to do any more with idols?" It is a great change; but it is such a great change as many of us have undergone, and such a change as everybody here must undergo, or else they shall never see the face of God with acceptance. Conversion, which is the first fruit of regeneration, makes such a difference in a man that it is as though he had been dead and buried and were now raised from the dead into newness of life. It is as much a change as if the man were destroyed and then were made again a new creature in Christ Jesus.

I wonder whether you have all felt such a change as this. I sometimes meet with persons who claim to be Christians and believers and all that, but they have never experienced any change that they can remember from their babyhood. Well, dear friend, there must have been such a change if you are a Christian. I will not say that you ought to know the day and the hour, but, depend upon it, if you are now what you were when you were born, you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. If there has not been a turning you are

going the wrong way; every man must be turned from the way in which father Adam set his face, for our face is towards sin and destruction, and we must be turned right round so as to have our faces towards holiness and everlasting life. Where there is not such a turning there is the most solemn cause for heart-searching and humiliation and for the seeking of salvation. Have you undergone a great transformation? The necessity for it is no make-up of mine, remember. It is that most solemn word of the New Testament—"Ye must be born again." There must be a complete and total change in you, so that the things you once loved you come to hate, and the things you hated you are made to love,—as great a change as there was in Ephraim, who was formerly glued to his idols and then came to abhor them. I pray you all to search and see whether such a difference has been made in your hearts by the Holy Ghost, for a mistake here will be fatal.

If you have never undergone such a renewing, let the prayer be breathed that the Holy Spirit may now renew you in the spirit of your mind: and if you hope that such a change has taken place upon you, then may God grant it may be a real abiding conversion, that so you may remain in grace, and go from strength to strength, till the idols shall be utterly abolished, and your whole nature shall become the temple of the living God.

Thus, then, we have two remarks—a sovereign prediction and a marvellous change.

III. Thirdly, there is in our text AN IMPLIED CONFESSION. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do *any more* with idols?" "Any more with idols!" Then, Ephraim, you have had a good deal to do with idols up till now? "Ay," saith he, with the tears in his eyes, "that I have." Hypocrites mean less than their language expresses, but true penitents mean much more than their bare words can convey. The confession of the text is all the more hearty because it is tacit, and as it were, slips out unintentionally.

Attend earnestly dear hearers, for, perhaps, some of you may be worshipping idols now. We will go into the temple of your heart and see whether we can find a false god there. I go into one heart, and, as I look up, I see a gigantic idol; it is gilded all over and clothed in shining robes: its eyes seem to be jewels, and its forehead is "as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires"; it is a very lovely idol to look upon. Come not too close, do not examine too severely, nor so much as dream of looking inside the hollow sham. Within it you will find all manner of rottenness and filthiness, but the outside of the idol is adorned with the greatest art and skill, and you may even become enamoured of it as you stand and gaze upon it. What is its name? Its name is *self-righteousness*. Well do I remember when I used to worship this image which my own hands had made, till one morning my god had his head broken off, and by-and-by I found his hands were gone, and soon I found that the worm was devouring it, and my god that I worshipped and trusted in turned out to be a heap of dross and dung, whereas I had thought it to be a mass of solid gold, with eyes of diamonds. Alas, there are many men to whom no such revelation has been given. Their idol is still in first-rate condition. True, perhaps, at Christmas-time it gets a little out of order, and they feel that they did not

quite behave as they ought when the bottle went round so freely, but they have called in the goldsmith to overlay the idol with new gold and gild the chipped places afresh. Have they not been to church since then? Did they not go on Christmas morning to a place of worship, and make it all right? Have they not repeated extra prayers, and given a little more away in charity? So they have furbished their god up again, and he looks very respectable. Ah, it is easy to tinker him up, my brethren, until the ark of the Lord comes in, and then all the smiths in the world cannot keep this god erect. If the gospel of Jesus Christ once enters into the soul, then, straightway, this wonderful god begins to bow himself, and, like Dagon, who was broken before the ark of the Lord, self-righteousness is dashed to pieces. But there are thousands all over this world who worship this god, and I will tell you how they pray to it. They say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are," and so on, not exactly in the Pharisee's language, but after the same style. "Lord, I thank thee that I pay everybody twenty shillings in the pound, and have brought up my children respectably. God, I thank thee that I have been a regular churchgoing or chapelgoing man all my life. God, I thank thee that I am not a swearer, nor yet a drunkard, nor anything of that kind. I am far better than most people; and if I do not get to heaven it will be very bad for my neighbours, for they are not half as good as I am." In this manner is this monstrous deity adored. I am not speaking of what is done in Hindustan, but of an idolatry very fashionable in England. The god of self-righteousness is lord paramount in millions of hearts. Oh, that every worshipper of that god may be led to say, "What have I to do any more with this abominable idol?"

Another sort of god I have seen in the human heart, is the idol of *darling sin*. A person not long ago said—"Well, I suppose there is a good deal in religion; but, you see, I am on the turf, and I could not leave it. How could I? I could not, of course, become a Christian man, and yet be known to be a betting man." Yes, the betting-ring was his god. The running horse is as favourite a deity as were the calves of Bethel.

Another man says, "Yes, yes. I should be glad to be a Christian, but you see I love the bottle, I must occasionally enjoy a drop too much; not often, you know, but now and then at convivial meetings, holidays and bonfire nights. A man must be drunk sometimes, must he not? And where's the harm? I could not give it up." They do not say so in actual words, but that is what they mean, thousands of them. They must still keep Bacchus for their god, and offer him their sacrifices. And, ah! what sacrifices they make. How they ruin health and destroy life itself, beggar their children, make their wives wretched, and all to worship this dunghill god of drink.

Others have some other darling sin. I need not mention all; in fact I could not, for the cheek of modesty would tingle if we were to mention certain of the vices which men and women feel that they could not cease from. They would fain be saved in their sins, not from their sins. They would worship God after a fashion, but the first place must be given to this darling lust of theirs. O sir, I care not what idol it is, but if

there is anything in this world that thou lovest better than Christ, thou shalt never see the face of God with joy. If there is any sin that thou wouldst persevere in, I beseech thee change thy mind about it, and cut it off, though it be a right hand, and pluck it out though it be a right eye. It were better for thee to enter into life maimed and with one eye than having both hands and both eyes to be cast into hell fire. Darling sins must be abjured if Christ is to be enjoyed.

Behold how idolaters disagree: one adores righteous self, and another worships sinful self; but both idols must be utterly abolished.

In some men's hearts I see *the love of pleasure*. That god is seated on the throne of many hearts. They are overcome not so much by the grosser sins as by their natural levity and trifling. They cannot think, they do not want to think. They say they are "dull" if they have to be quiet for awhile. They like to be always amused, gratified, excited. Now, there is a measure of recreation which is as good as medicine both to body and soul, and there are proper recreations to be had. God has provided innocent pleasures, and we shall do well to accept them with gratitude from our heavenly Father; but to be a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God is to be dead while you live. To make your belly your god, to live to eat and drink, to be just meat-digesters and wine-strainers, to be living here merely to enjoy yourself—butterflies flitting from flower to flower, gathering no honey, but merely seeking pleasure—this is evil. Sirs, this is a god that will not be worshipped by one who knows the love of God, for his God is his pleasure, and pleasure is not his god. He casts aside all other things that he might otherwise have allowed himself to enjoy, that he may honour and glorify his Saviour the more.

Many worship the golden calf. They indulge no vice, and pursue no pleasure, except their one vice and their one pleasure, which is *their greed of gold*. If you want to arouse all their energies, jingle a guinea near them. This they pursue as the hounds pursue the fox, hot foot, and never resting. For fear they should be poor when they are old, they make themselves poor when they are young; and, lest they should be starved at last, they starve themselves to the last. We have known some to whom honour, love, uprightness, integrity, religion, have all been nothing whatever, so long as gain could be had by sacrificing them. The great fabric of their fortune has rolled along, like the car of Juggernaut, crushing everything that has been in its way. Widows might weep, and orphans might lament, the groans of those whom they oppressed might go up to heaven, and the iniquities which they have perpetrated might go before them unto judgment; but it was nothing to them. They were adding field to field and house to house, and getting richer and richer: for that they lived, and for that they seemed content to die. O God, convert the man who worships gold! Milton, you know, describes the demon of greed as

"Mammon the least erected spirit that fell
From heaven; for even in heaven his looks and thoughts
Were always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,
Than ought divine or holy else enjoyed
In vision beatific."

are worse a great deal than I thought you were. Suppose it was reported commonly that Mr. Hill fed on carrion and was very fond of eating rotten meat. And suppose somebody came to me and said 'I hear, Mr. Hill, that you are very fond of eating carrion.' 'Oh, no,' I say, 'Not at all. I do not regularly feed on it, I only eat a dish of it once or twice a year for a treat!' Then everybody would say, 'You are fonder of it than we thought. For if poor creatures have to eat it every day because they cannot get anything better, their taste is not so vitiated as yours who turn away from wholesome food, and find rottenness to be a dainty dish.'" If you can find your pleasure and delight where sin of the worst kind is always very near at hand, where religion would be out of place, and where Christ your Master could not be expected to come, you have not learned to say with Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Run away from anything which has the least taint of sin, and may God help you so to do even to the end. Is this in order that you may be saved? God forbid! I am only speaking to you who are saved already. If you are not saved, the first thing is to have a renewed heart by faith in Jesus Christ, and after that we lay no bondage on you, and exact no tax from you by way of duty, but it will be your joy, your delight, your privilege, to keep near to your Master and to say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" God bless you for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hosea xiii. xiv.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these."—Judges xiii. 22, 23.

THE first remark arising out of the story of Manoah and his wife is this—that oftentimes we pray for blessings which will make us tremble when we receive them. Manoah had asked that he might see the angel, and he saw him: in answer to his request the wonderful One condescended to reveal himself a second time, but the consequence was that the good man was filled with astonishment and dismay, and turning to his wife, he exclaimed, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." Brethren, do we always know what we are asking for when we pray? We are imploring an undoubted blessing, and yet if we knew the way in which such blessing must necessarily come, we should, perhaps, hesitate before we pressed our suit. You have been entreating very much for growth in holiness. Do you know, brother, that in almost every case that means increased affliction? for we do not make much progress in the divine life except when the Lord is pleased to try us in the furnace and purge us with many fires. Do you desire the mercy on that condition? Are you willing to take it as God pleases to send it, and to say, "Lord, if spiritual growth implies trial, if it signifies a long sickness of body, if it means deep depression of soul, if it entails the loss of property, if it involves the taking away of my dearest friends, yet I make no reserve, but include in the prayer all that is needful to the good end. When I say, sanctify me wholly, spirit, soul, and body, I leave the process to thy discretion." Suppose you really knew all that it would bring upon you, would you not pray, at any rate, with more solemn tones? I hope you would not hesitate, but, counting all the cost, would still desire to be delivered from sin; but, at any rate, you would put up your petition with deliberation, weighing every syllable, and then when

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the answer came you would not be so astonished at its peculiar form. Often and often the blessing which we used so eagerly to implore is the occasion of the suffering which we deplore. We do not know God's methods. We set him ways which he does not choose to follow, even as John Newton confessed to have done when he asked that he might grow in grace. He says

"I hoped that in some favoured hour,
At once he'd answer my request,
And, by his love's constraining power
Subdue my sins and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea, more, with his own hand he seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low."

This is the Lord's way of answering prayer for faith and grace. He comes with rods of chastisement, and makes us smart for our follies, for thus alone can he deliver our childish spirits from them. He comes with sharp ploughshares and tears up the soul, for thus only can we be made to yield him a harvest. He comes with hot irons and burns us to the heart; and when we enquire, "Why all this?" the answer comes to us, "This is what you asked for, this is the way in which the Lord answers your requests." Perhaps, at this moment, the fainting feeling that some of you are now experiencing, which makes you fear that you will surely die, may be accounted for by your own prayers. I should like you to look at your present sorrows in that light, and say, "After all, I can see that now my God has given to me exactly what I sought at his hands. I asked to see the angel, and I have seen him, and now it is that my spirit is cast down within me."

A second remark is this—*Very frequently deep prostration of spirit is the forerunner of some remarkable blessing.* It was to Manoah and to his wife the highest conceivable joy of life, the climax of their ambition, that they should be the parents of a son by whom the Lord should begin to deliver Israel. Joy filled them—inexpressible joy—at the thought of it; but, at the time when the good news was first communicated, Manoah, at least, was made so heavy in spirit that he said, "We shall surely die, for we have seen an angel of the Lord." Take it as a general rule that dull skies foretell a shower of mercy. Expect sweet favour when you experience sharp affliction. When God's great wagons loaded down with blessings are coming to your door, you will full often hear beforehand the wheels rolling and rumbling horridly. You will think that it is the death-cart, mayhap, although it is your Father's treasure-wain that is coming to your door. Do you not remember, concerning the apostles, that they feared as they entered into the cloud on Mount Tabor? and yet it was in that cloud that they saw their Master transfigured; and you and I have had many a fear about the cloud we were entering, although we were therein to see more of Christ and his glory

than we had ever beheld before. The cloud which you fear makes the external wall of that secret chamber wherein the Lord reveals himself. It is the thick veil which seems to shut out the light of day, but as we pass behind it into what seems the thick darkness we behold the bright light of the shekinah of God's presence shining above the mercy seat. Trials come before comforts, like John the Baptist with his rough garment before Jesus the consolation of Israel: be therefore of good cheer.

Blessed be God for rough winds. They have blown home many a barque which else had sailed to destruction. Blessed be God for trial; it has been Christ's black dog to fetch in many a sheep which else had wandered into the wolf's jaws. Blessed be our Master for the fire: it has burnt away the dross. Blessed be our Master for the file: it has taken off the rust. Not in themselves considered are these things blessings, but they are often overruled to be so by the mighty hand of God, and they are frequently the harbingers of great favours yet to come. Before thou canst carry Samson in thy arms, Manoah, thou must be made to say, "We shall surely die." Before the minister shall preach the word to thousands, he must be emptied and made to tremble under a sense of inability. Before the Sunday-school teacher shall bring her girls to Christ, she shall be led to see how weak and insufficient she is. I do believe that whenever the Lord is about to use us in his household, he takes us like a dish and wipes us right out and sets us on the shelf, and then afterwards he takes us down and puts thereon his own heavenly meat, with which to fill the souls of others. There must as a rule be an emptying, a turning upside down, and a putting on one side, before the very greatest blessing comes. Manoah felt that he must die, and yet die he could not, for he was to be the father of Samson, the deliverer of Israel and the terror of Philistia.

Let me offer a third remark, which is this—*great faith is in many instances subject to fits*. What great faith Manoah had! His wife was barren, yet when she was told by the angel that she should bear a child, he believed it, although no heavenly messenger had come to himself personally—so believed it that he did not want to see the man of God a second time to be told that it would be so, but only to be informed how to bring up the child: that was all. "Well," says old Bishop Hall, "might he be the father of strong Samson, that had such a strong faith." He had a strong faith indeed, and yet here he is saying in alarm, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." Do not judge a man by any solitary word or act, for if you do you will surely mistake him. Cowards are occasionally brave, and the bravest men are sometimes cowards; and there are men who would be worse cowards practically if they were a little less cowardly than they are. A man may be too much a coward to confess that he is timid. Trembling Manoah was so outspoken, honest, and sincere that he expressed his feelings, which a more politic person might have concealed. Though fully believing what had been spoken from God, yet at the same time this doubt was on him, as the result of his belief in tradition: "We shall surely die, because we have seen God."

You know how many parallel cases there are in Scripture to this. Look at majestic Abraham, the very father of the faithful—a prince, I

might call him, amongst believers; and yet he denies his wife, and says, "She is my sister." These things do not prove that he had no faith: they only show that the strongest faith is mixed with unbelief, and that the best of men are men at the best. So, too, with mighty Elijah. When you see him on the top of Carmel pleading there with God, and bringing down the fire, and when you hear him cry, "Take the prophets of Baal: let not one escape," and observe that man of iron, slaying them all at the foot of the hill, why you cannot believe it possible that he is the same trembler who flees from the face of Jezebel, and sits down under one of the desert junipers, and cries, "Let me die: I am no better than my fathers." But it is so. It is ever so. God's saints generally show their weakness in the very grace wherein their strength lieth, and this great believer, Manoah, is troubled with a miserable attack of doubt, which so masters him that he expects sudden death.

Now, have any of you lately had such a fit as that upon you? Well, dear friend, do not indulge it. Let it be a fit, and let it come to an end, as no doubt it did with Manoah. He did not continue long in his fainting condition, but it was bad while it lasted. It is very bad when persons have fits every day, and worse still if they are always in fits. It will not do for us to begin to make excuses for our unbelief, or to allow ourselves to remain in depression of spirit. Our soul must not be suffered to lie cleaving to the dust. We must catechise our hearts, and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God." Yet do not be surprised, or write your own condemnation, as though some strange thing had befallen you, for so hath it happened unto others, that though they have been strong in faith they have had strong misgivings at times.

Once again, another remark is that *it is a great mercy to have a Christian companion to go to for counsel and comfort whenever your soul is depressed*. Manoah had married a capital wife. She was the better one of the two in sound judgment. She was the weaker vessel by nature, but she was the stronger believer, and probably that was why the angel was sent to her, for the angels are best pleased to speak with those who have faith, and if they have the pick of their company, and the wife has more faith than the husband, they will visit the wife sooner than her spouse, for they love to take God's messages to those who will receive them with confidence. She was full of faith, evidently, and so when her husband tremblingly said, "We shall surely die," she did not believe in such a mistrustful inference. Moreover, though they say that women cannot reason, yet here was a woman whose arguments were logical and overwhelming. Certain it is that women's perceptions are generally far clearer than men's reasonings: they look at once into a truth, while we are hunting for our spectacles. Their instincts are generally as safe as our reasonings, and therefore when they have in addition a clear logical mind they make the wisest of counsellors.

Well, Manoah's wife not only had clear perceptions, but she had capital reasoning faculties. She argued, according to the language of the text, that it was not possible that God should kill them after what they had seen and heard. Oh that every man had such a prudent;

gracious wife as Manoah had! Oh that whenever a man is cast down a Christian brother or sister stood ready to cheer him with some reminder of the Lord's past goodness, or with some gracious promise from the divine word. It may happen to be the husband who cheers the wife, and in such a case it is equally beautiful. We have known a Christian sister to be very nervous and very often depressed and troubled: what a mercy to her to have a Christian husband whose strength of faith can encourage her to smile away her griefs, by resting in the everlasting faithfulness and goodness of the Lord. How careful ought young people to be in the choosing of their partners in life! When two horses pull together how smoothly the chariot runs; but if one horse draws one way and the other pulls in the opposite direction, what trouble there is sure to be. Suppose Manoah had happened to have an unbelieving wife. Ah, Manoah, how your spirit would have gone down, down, down into despair, till you would have fulfilled your own sad prophecy. If he had been troubled with a wife like Mistress Job, and she had uttered some bitter saying just at the time when he was in anguish, how much more severe would his griefs have become. But Mistress Manoah was a believing woman, she argued out the question most discreetly, and her husband found peace again.

To-night, as God the Holy Spirit shall help us, we will take up the argument of Manoah's wife, and see whether it will not also comfort our hearts. She had three strings to her bow, good woman. One was—The Lord does not mean to kill us, because he has accepted our sacrifices. The second was—He does not mean to kill us, or else he would not have shown us all these things. And the third was—He will not kill us, or else he would not, as at this time, have told us such things as these. So the three strings to her bow were *accepted sacrifices*, *gracious revelations*, and *precious promises*. Let us dwell upon each of them.

I. And, first, **ACCEPTED SACRIFICES**. I will suppose that I am addressing a brother who is sadly tried, and terribly cast down, and who therefore has begun to lament—

“The Lord has forsaken me quite :
My God will be gracious no more.”

Brother, is that possible? Has not God of old accepted on your behalf the offering of his Son Jesus Christ? You have believed in Jesus, dear friend. You do believe in him now. Lay your hand on your heart, and put the question solemnly to yourself, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” You are able to say, “Yes, Lord, notwithstanding all my unhappiness, I do believe in thee, and rest the stress and weight of my soul's interests on thy power to save.” Well, then, you have God's own word, recorded in his own infallible Book, assuring you that Jesus Christ was accepted of God on your behalf, for he laid down his life for as many as believe in him, that they might never perish. He stood as their surety, and suffered as their substitute, is it possible that this should be unavailing, and that after all they may be cast away? The argument of Manoah's wife was just this—“Did we not put the kid on the rock, and as we put it there was it not consumed? It was consumed instead of us; we shall not die, for the victim has been consumed. The fire will not burn us: it has spent itself upon the sacrifice.

Did you not see it go up in smoke, and see the angel ascend with it? The fire is gone; it cannot fall on us to destroy us." This being interpreted into the gospel is just this—Have we not seen the Lord Jesus Christ fastened to the cross? Have we not beheld him in agonies extreme? Has not the fire of God consumed him? Have we not seen him rising, as it were, from that sacred fire in the resurrection and the ascension, to go into the glory? Because the fire of Jehovah's wrath had spent itself on him we shall not die. He has died instead of us. It cannot be that the Lord has made him suffer, the just for the unjust, and now will make the believer suffer too. It cannot be that Christ loved his church, and gave himself for it, and that now the church must perish also. It cannot be that the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all, and now will lay our iniquity on us too. It were not consistent with justice. It would make the vicarious sacrifice of Christ to be a nullity, a superfluity of cruelty which achieved nothing. The atonement cannot be made of none effect, the very supposition would be blasphemy. O, look, my soul, look to the Redeemer's cross, and as thou seest how God accepts Christ, be thou filled with content. Hear how the "It is finished" of Jesus on earth is echoed from the throne of God himself, as he raises up his Son from the dead, and bestows glory upon him: hear this, I say, and as thou hearest, attend to the power of this argument,—If the Lord had been pleased to kill us, he would not have accepted his Son for us. If he meant us to die, would he have put him to death too? How can it be? The sacrifice of Jesus must effectually prevent the destruction of those for whom he offered up himself as a sacrifice. Jesus dying for sinners, and yet the sinners denied mercy! Inconceivable and impossible! My soul, whatever thy inward feelings and the tumult of thy thoughts, the accepted sacrifice shows that God is not pleased to kill thee.

But, if you notice, in the case of Manoah, they had offered a burnt-sacrifice and a meat-offering too. Well, now, in addition to the great, grand sacrifice of Christ, which is our trust, we, dear brothers and sisters, have offered other sacrifices to God, and in consequence of his acceptance of such sacrifices we cannot imagine that he intends to destroy us.

First, let me conduct your thoughts back to the offering of prayer which you have presented. I will speak for myself. I recall now, running over my diary mentally, full many an instance in which I have sought the Lord in prayer and he has most graciously heard me. I am as sure that my requests have been heard as ever Manoah could have been sure that his sacrifice was consumed upon the rock. May I not infer from this that the Lord does not mean to destroy me? You know that it has been so with you, dear brother. You are down in the dumps to-day, you are beginning to raise many questions about divine love; but there have been times—you know there have—when you have sought the Lord and he has heard you. You can say, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him from all his fears." Perhaps you have not jotted down the fact in a book, but your memory holds the indelible record. Your soul has made her personal boast in the Lord concerning his fidelity to his promise in helping his people in the hour of need, for you have happily proved it in your own case. Now, brother, if the Lord had been pleased to kill you, would

he have heard your prayers? If he had meant to cast you out after all, would he have heard you so many times? If he had sought a quarrel against you he might have had cause for that quarrel many years ago, and have said to you, "When you make many prayers I will not hear." But since he has listened to your cries and tears, and many a time answered your petitions, he cannot intend to kill you.

Again, you brought to him, years ago, not only your prayers but *yourself*. Remember that glad hour when you said,

"Now, O God, thine own I am;
Now I give thee back thine own;
Freedom, friends, and health, and fame,
Consecrate to thee alone;
Thine I live, thrice happy I!
Happier still if thine I die."

You gave yourself over to Christ, body, soul, spirit, all your goods, all your hours, all your talents, every faculty, and every possible acquirement, and you said, "Lord, I am not my own, but I am bought with a price." Now, at that time did not the Lord accept you? You have at this very moment a lively recollection of the sweet sense of acceptance you had at that time. Even now your heart sings,

"Lord in the strength of grace
With a glad heart and free,
Myself, my residue of days,
I consecrate to thee."

Though you are at this time sorely troubled, yet you would not wish to withdraw from the consecration which you then made, but on the contrary you declare,

"High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till, in life's latest hour, I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."

Now, would the Lord have accepted the offering of yourself to him if he meant to destroy you? Would he have let you say, "I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds"? Would he have permitted you to declare as you can boldly assert to-night, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," delighting to remember the time of your baptism into him, whereby your body, washed with his pure body, was declared to be the Lord's for ever. Would he enable you to feel a joy in the very mark of your consecration, as well as in the consecration itself, if he meant to slay you? Oh, surely not! He does not let a man give himself up to him, and then cast him away. That cannot be.

Some of us, dear friends, can recollect how, growing out of this last sacrifice, there have been others. The Lord has accepted our offerings at other times too, for our works, faith, and labours of love have been owned of his Spirit. There are some of you, I am pleased to remember, whom God has blest to the conversion of little children whom you have tried to teach for Jesus. You have some in heaven whom you brought to the Saviour, and there are others on earth whom you can look upon

with great joy because God was pleased to make you the instrument of their conviction and their after conversion. Some of you, I perceive, are ministers of the gospel, others of you preach at the corners of the streets, and there have been times in your lives—I am sure that you wish they were ten times as many—in which God has been pleased to succeed your efforts, so that hearts have yielded to the sway of Jesus. Now, you do not put any trust in those things, nor do you claim any merit for having served your Master, but still I think they may be thrown in as a matter of consolation, and you may say, If the Lord had meant to destroy me, would he have enabled me to preach his gospel? Would he have helped me to weep over men's souls? Would he have enabled me to gather those dear children like lambs to his bosom? Would he have granted me my longing desire to bear fruit in his vineyard, if he did not mean to bless me? Surely he will not let me be like Judas, who preached the gospel and betrayed his Master. But, having accepted me and given me joy in my work, and success in it, he will continue with me and help me even to the end. As Mr. Wealey well puts it—

“ Me, if purposed to destroy
For past unfaithfulness,
Would God vouchsafe to employ
And still so strangely bless!”

Those are comparatively small things, but sometimes small things help our small minds. Little fishes are sweet, and little diamonds are precious, and so little evidences may let in a great deal of peace. They may at least help us while we are looking out for something better, so that we may rise out of our troubles and grasp the higher joys.

So much upon the first point. Mistress Manoah argued that, if God had accepted their offerings, he did not mean to kill them; and there is our argument to-night, for he has accepted the great sacrifice of Christ, and then he has accepted the sacrifices which his grace has enabled us to offer, and therefore he does not mean to kill us.

“ Who said he did?” says somebody. Well, the devil has said that numbers of times. He is a liar from the beginning, and he does not improve a bit. He will have the impudence to say this to you when you have just been in the presence of Christ. As you come fresh from the closet he will meet you outside the door, and he will tell you that the Lord has utterly forsaken you, for there are no bounds to his falsehood. Reply to him, if he is worth replying to at all, in the language of our text.

II. But now, secondly, the second argument was that they had received GRACIOUS REVELATIONS. “ If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have shewed us all these things.”

Now, what has the Lord shown you, my dear brother? I will mention one or two things.

First, the Lord has shown you, perhaps years ago, or possibly at this moment he is showing you for the first time—*your sin*. What a sight that was when we first had it. Some of you never saw your sins, but your sins are there all the same. In an old house, perhaps, there is a cellar into which nobody goes, and the windows are always kept shut. There is a wooden shutter: no light ever comes in. You live in the house comfortably

nough, not knowing what is there; but one day you take a candle, and go down the steps, and open that mouldy door, and when it is opened, dear me! What a damp, pestilential smell! How foul the floor is! All sorts of living creatures hop away from under your feet. There are growths on the very walls—a heap of roots in the corner, sending out those long yellow growths which look like the fingers of death. And here is a spider, and there are a hundred like him, of such a size as cannot be grown, except in such horrible places. You get out as quickly as ever you can. You do not like the look of it. Now, the candle did not make that cellar bad; the candle did not make it filthy. No, the candle only showed what there was. And when you get in the carpenter to take down that shutter which you could not open anyhow, for it had not been opened for years, and when the daylight comes in, it seems more horrible than it did by candle-light, and you wonder, indeed, however you did go across it with all those dreadful things all around you, and you cannot be satisfied to live upstairs now till that cellar downstairs has been perfectly cleansed. That is just like our heart; it is full of sin, but we do not know it. It is a den of unclean birds, a menagerie of everything that is fearful, and fierce, and furious—a little hell stocked with devils. Such is our nature; such is our heart. Now, the Lord showed me mine years ago, as he did some of you, and the result of a sight of one's heart is horrible. Well does Dr. Young say, "God spares all eyes but his own, that fearful sight, a naked human heart." Nobody ever did see all his heart as it really is. You have only seen a part, but, when seen, it is so horrible that it is enough to drive a man out of his senses to see the evil of his nature.

Now, let us gather some honey out of this dead lion. Brother, if the Lord had meant to destroy us, he would not have shown us our sin, because we were happy enough previously, were we not? In our own poor way we were content enough, and if he did not mean to pardon us, it was not like the Lord to show us our sin, and so to torment us before our time, unless he meant to take it away. We were swine, but we were satisfied enough with the husks we ate; and why not let us remain swine? What was the good of letting us see our filthiness if he did not purpose to take it away? It never can be possible that God sets himself studiously to torture the human mind by making it conscious of its evil, if he never intends to supply a remedy. Oh no! A deep sense of sin will not save you, but it is a pledge that there is something begun in your soul which may lead to salvation; for that deep sense of sin does as good as say, "The Lord is laying bare the disease that he may cure it. He is letting you see the foulness of that underground cellar of your corruption, because he means to cleanse it for you." So, dear brethren, if the Lord had meant to kill us he would not have shown us such things as the infamy of our nature and the horror of our fall; but since he has revealed to us our nakedness and poverty he desires to clothe and enrich us.

But he has shown us more than this, for he has made us see *the hollowness and emptiness of the world*. There are some here present who, at one time, were very gratified with the pleasures and amusements of the world. The theatre was a great delight to them. The ball-room afforded them supreme satisfaction. To be able to dress just after their

own fancy, and to spend money on their own whims, were the very cause of delight; but there came a time when across all these the soul perceived a mysterious handwriting, which being interpreted ran thus:—"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." These very people went to the same amusements, but they seemed so dull and stupid that they came away saying, "We do not care a bit for them. The joys are all gone. What seemed gold turns out to be gilt; and what we thought worth was only white paint. The varnish is cracked, the tinsel is faded, the colouring has vanished. Mirth laughs like an idiot, and pleasure grins like madness." I have known persons in that condition of mind seek after still more stirring pleasures. They have thought that, if they went a step farther, till what was mere amusement came to be vice, perhaps they might find something there. They have tried it, till they have drained all the cups of the devil's banquet, and found themselves sickening as lukewarm water, insipid, and even nauseous. Satisfaction has come upon them, and they have been weary of life. Now, brethren, the Lord has taught many of us this in different ways, even those of us who have never gone very far into worldly amusements; and so we have learned that there is nothing round the spacious globe that can satisfy a hungry soul. We, too, have heard the words, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity," sounding in our hearts; and now do you think that, if the Lord had meant to kill us, he would have taught us this? Why, no; he would have said, "Let them alone, they are given unto idols. They are only going to have one world in which they can rejoice; let them enjoy it." He would have let the swine go on with their husks if he had not meant to turn them into his children, and bring them to his own bosom. I think I told you once of a story which illustrates this, of a good wife—a good Christian woman—who had been converted. Her husband remained a godless and licentious man. Nevertheless, her gentleness and patience were surpassing, and one night, while out in a drinking party, her husband made a boast that there was not one of them that had such a wife as he had. He said she was far too religious, but for all that there was never such a woman; "and if I were to take you now," said he, "ten of you, home to supper to-night, though it is past twelve, she would provide for you, receive you with a smile, and never say a syllable by way of complaint."

They did not believe it, and so they went down to the house. She was sitting up past midnight, weary, and the wicked husband said he had brought in his friends and he wished them to have some supper. She had to forage very carefully, and make the best of what there was in the house, and she begged the gentlemen to have a little patience and wait; the meal might not be quite served as she should like to have it, since the servants were in bed, but still she would do her best. She managed well, the company sat down at the table, the lady treated them most graciously, and the husband had won his bet. Then they asked her how it was that she could bear with such treatment, and act so nobly. Bursting into tears, when they pressed her again and again, she answered, "I have long prayed for my dear husband, and anxiously desired his salvation, but I am afraid he never will be saved, and so I have made up my mind to make him as happy as possible while he is here, fearing he will have no happiness hereafter." Now do you not

think that God would act on that principle with you and with me if he meant to leave us to perish? Would he not allow us to have the enjoyment of this world at any rate? But because he has taught us that this world is a mockery and a cheat, I gather that he will not destroy us.

But he has taught us something better than this—namely, *the preciousness of Christ*. Unless we are awfully deceived—self-deceived, I mean—we have known what it is to lose the burden of our sin at the foot of the cross. We have known what it is to see the suitability and all-sufficiency of the merit of our dear Redeemer, and we have rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. If he had meant to destroy us he would not have shown us Christ.

Sometimes also we have strong desires after God! What pinings after communion with him have we felt! What longings to be delivered from sin! What yearnings to be perfect! What aspirations to be with him in heaven, and what desires to be like him while we are here! Now these longings, cravings, desirings, yearnings, do you think the Lord would have put them into our hearts if he had meant to destroy us? What would be the good of it? Would it not be tormenting us as Tantalus was tormented? Would it not, indeed, be a superfluity of cruelty thus to make us wish for what we could never have, and pine after what we should never gain? O beloved, let us be comforted about these things. If he had meant to kill us, he would not have shown us such things as these.

III. I shall have no time to dwell upon the last source of comfort, which is what the Lord has spoken to us—**MANY PRECIOUS PROMISES**. "Nor would he have told us such things as these." At almost any time when a child of God is depressed, if he goes to the word of God and to prayer, and looks up, he will generally get a hold of some promise or other. I know I generally do. I could not tell you, dear brother, to-night, what promise would suit your case, but the Lord always knows how to apply the right word at the right time; and when a promise is applied with great power to the soul, and you are enabled to plead it at the mercy-seat, you may say, "If the Lord had meant to kill us he would not have made us such a promise as this." I have a promise that hangs up before my eyes whenever I wake every morning, and it has continued in its place for years. It is a stay to my soul. It is this—"I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." Difficulties arise, funds run short, sickness comes; but somehow or other my text always seems to flow like a fountain—"I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have said that to us.

What is your promise to-night, brother? What have you got a hold of? If you have not laid hold of any, and feel as if none belonged to you, yet there are such words as these, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and you are one. Ah, if he had meant to destroy you, he would not have spoken a text of such a wide character on purpose to include your case. A thousand promises go down to the lowest deep into which a heart can ever descend, and if the Lord had meant to destroy a soul in the deeps, he would not have sent a gospel promise down even to that extreme.

I must have done, and therefore I should like to say these two or

three words to-night to you who are unconverted, but who are troubled in your souls. You think that God means to destroy you. Now, dear friend, I take it that if the Lord had meant to kill you, he would not have sent the gospel to you. If there had been a purpose and a decree to destroy you, he would not have brought you here. I am glad to see unconverted people here on Thursday nights. When souls begin to love week-night services I always think that there is a something good in them towards the Lord God of Israel. Now you are sitting to hear that Jesus has died to save such as you are. You are sitting where you are bidden to trust him and be saved. If the Lord had meant to slay you I do not think he would have sent me on such a fruitless errand as to tell you of a Christ who could not save you. I think, on Thursday nights especially, I may hope that I have a picked congregation whom God intends to bless. Besides, some of you have had your lives spared very remarkably. You have been in accidents on land or on sea—perhaps in battle and shipwreck. You have been raised from a sick bed. If the Lord had meant to destroy you, surely he would have let you die then; but he has spared you, and you are getting on in years; surely it is time that you yielded to his mercy and gave yourself up into the hands of grace. If the Lord had meant to destroy you, surely, he would not have brought you here to-night, for, possibly, I am addressing one who has come here, wondering why. All the time that he has been sitting here he has been saying to himself, "I do not know how I got into this place, but here I am." God means to bless you to-night, I trust, and he will, dear friend, if you breathe this prayer to heaven,—“Father, forgive me! I have sinned against heaven and before thee, but for Christ's sake forgive me! I put my trust in thy Son.” You shall find eternal life, rejoicing in the sacrifice which God has accepted. You shall one of these days rejoice in the revelations of his love, and in the promises which he gives you, and say as we say to-night, “If the Lord were pleased to kill us he would not have showed us all these things.” The Lord bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Judges xiii.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—784, 788.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

RETREAT IMPOSSIBLE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."—Judges xi. 35.

In Jephthah's case there were good reasons for going back. He had made a rash vow, and such things are much better broken than kept. If a man makes a vow to commit a crime his vow to do so is in itself a sin, and the carrying out of his vow will be doubly sinful. If a man's vowing to do a thing made it necessary and right for him to do it, then the whole moral law might be suspended by the mere act of vowing, for a man might vow to steal, to commit adultery, or to murder, and then say, "I was right in all those acts, because I vowed to do them." This is self-evidently absurd, and to admit such a principle would be to destroy all morality. You have, first of all, no right to promise to do what is wrong; and then, secondly, your promise, which is in itself wrong, cannot make a criminal act to be right. If you have come under a rash vow, you must not dare to keep it. You ought to go before God and repent that you have made a vow which involves sin; but as to keeping the sinful vow, that were to add sin to sin. "But," saith one, "would it not be sin to break my vow?" I reply, there was great sin in making it; and there will probably be some measure of sin connected with your breaking it, for few human actions are perfect; but to keep your evil vow would certainly be sin, and you must not commit the greater sin to avoid the less sin which perhaps may be involved in the breach of your foolish promise. I think it would have been well if Jephthah, though he had opened his mouth before God, had gone back when it involved; as I think it did, so dreadful a necessity as that of sacrificing his own innocent, only child. His having sworn to do it did not make it right: it was just as wrong. If he really did slay her, it was a horrible action, dramatize or disguise it as you may. He had no right to make the dangerous promise; he had still less right to carry it out after he had made it, if it led to such terrible consequences.

But now I am going to speak about other openings of the mouth to God, in which there is no ill; openings of the mouth which need
No. 1,841.

never be regretted, which certainly never can be recalled, and of which we may rightly say, before the living God, in the strength which he gives us, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

My sermon will not have much to do with some of you. You have not opened your mouth to God, or made any sort of promise; but you remain as you were, far off from him, and negligent of his claims. I do not envy you. Your being under no obligation from any resolution of your own does not prevent your being under just as much natural obligation to God on account of your being his creatures and therefore subjects under his law. I sometimes hear of people who say, "You know I do not profess anything," and after that assertion they appear to feel at liberty to say and do whatever they like. Now, if we heard of certain persons entrusted with our business that they had not acted honestly, what should we think of it if one man among them should rise up and say, "Don't blame me. You know I never professed to be honest." What would that mean? It would mean that he is a confessed and acknowledged thief. Suppose a man were to say, "Well, I never profess to be truthful," what is he? He is an acknowledged liar. And he who says, "Ah, I never made any vows or promises, neither do I pretend to serve the Lord," acknowledges himself to be a godless man. He is living in the daily robbery of God, defrauding him of his rights: he is living in direct and avowed rebellion against the King of kings. He is living without a hope for the hereafter—without grace in his soul for the present, and without glory in prospect for the future. Ah, friend, although the things I may have to say at this time may not directly bear upon *you*, yet the very fact that they do not bear upon you should make you think, and weigh, and consider, and ponder your ways as to the place which you now occupy. You are, by your non-profession and non-avowal of Christ, making a confession of being on the opposite side; for he that is not with him is against him, and he that gathereth not with him scattereth abroad.

But now I speak to my own brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus. Dear friends, there are three things which I would bring to your practical remembrance; first, *what we have done*: we have opened our mouth unto the Lord. Secondly, *what we cannot do*: "I cannot go back"; and, thirdly, *what we must do*: there are some things that we must seek after if we are to be able to hold on and to act faithfully to our profession.

I. First, then, **WHAT WE HAVE DONE**. "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord."

We have opened our mouths before the Lord, first, *by confessing our faith in Jesus Christ*. I have said, and most of you upon whom I am looking have also solemnly said, before others, "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart. Let others believe what they will and trust in what they please:

'My hope is fixed on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.'

We are troubled by no question of our Lord's power to save, or of our interest in his salvation, but we have testified outright, as a matter-of-

fact which we feel in our own souls, that we believe that Jesus died for us, and that he is all our salvation and all our desire. We have opened our mouth to that in the most decided manner, and we are continually doing so in various ways.

We have also avowed and declared before the living God that we are Christ's disciples and followers. If any one should ask us, "Art thou one of them? Dost thou consort with Jesus of Nazareth?" We would gladly answer, "Yes." However short we come of perfect obedience to his commands, yet his will is our rule. We call him "Master" and "Lord," and when we read about the disciples of Christ we think of ourselves as belonging to them. Blessed Master, how glad we are to own that we are indeed thy disciples. We are not ashamed to acknowledge that we have opened our mouth unto thee, to believe all thy teachings, and to obey all thy commands.

We have opened our mouth to the Lord, next, because as we believe in Jesus Christ, and take him to be our Master, so we *have admitted the Redeemer's claims to our persons and services, and have resolved to live for him alone all our days.* We have made a dedication of ourselves to his service, declaring that we are not our own, but bought with a price. Some of us did this years ago; and—

"High heaven that heard the solemn vow,
That vow, renewed, has often heard,"

and shall hear it again. We do profess that nothing that we have is ours, but our goods, our hours, our talents, and ourselves are all marked with the broad arrow of the King. We are the perpetual heritage of the Lord, to be his for ever, and never to serve self again, or the world, or the flesh, or any, save Jesus.

We have also cast in our lot with his people. We belong to their fraternity heart and soul. We are not ashamed of them either. It is some years ago with some of us since we came forward and asked to have our names enrolled with the despised people of God, and we opened our mouth to the Lord that we would take part and lot with his people—that if they were abused we would take a share of the abuse, that if they had sorrows we would help to bear their burdens, and if they had joys we only hoped that we might be worthy to enjoy the crumbs of their table. We craved to be numbered with the citizens of that noble city, the New Jerusalem, and we requested to share the portion of Zion's blessed but tried inhabitants, whether they held fast or festival, suffered siege or enjoyed triumph. We asked to have it said of us that we were born there, and when we were asked if we would forego the world and all its allurements to become heirs of the better country we stood up before the Lord and declared that it was even so.

In all these things we have, as Christian people, opened our mouths unto the Lord, have we not? Now, if you ask me when you did so, I shall have to mention several occasions.

Some of us opened our mouths in this respect to the Lord in a very solemn way *in private*. We made our dedication to God a solemn deed performed in a distinct and formal manner. We took time about it, thought it over, and then did it deliberately and definitely. Some have even written out an act of solemn dedication, and signed it.

Others, perhaps, more wisely, have refrained from writing it, lest it should become a bondage to their spirits, but they have, nevertheless, made a formal act of transfer of themselves, and all that they had, to the Lord. At any rate, whether we did it formally or not, we can say,

"'Tis done! The great transaction's done,
I am my Lord's, and he is mine."

There was a time when once for all we gave up the keys of the city of Mansoul, and surrendered to the Lord absolutely, that he might be ours, and that we might be his for ever and ever.

Then many of you, beloved friends, opened your mouth to the Lord in baptism. Searching his word, you saw there clearly that as many as believed were baptized. You read of the eunuch to whom the question was put, "Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? for if thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest;" and then on confession of his faith he was baptized. I have opened my mouth unto the Lord in that manner. I remember the solemn occasion when I went into the river, with multitudes of people as witnesses on either bank, to mark my burial with the Lord in the water: and, though I have not the remotest confidence in outward form or ceremony, yet often has my soul-recalled that day when I did before men and angels and devils declare myself to be the servant of the living God, and was therefore buried in water in token of my death to all the world, and then raised from it as the emblem of my newness of life. Oh, to be always faithful to what we then did, when, coming forward of our own accord, we declared that we were dead with Christ, that we might also live with him.

We have opened our mouth unto the Lord since then, full often when we have come to the *communion table*. The solemn sitting down at the table of communion, when others have to go away, or can only look on—the separation which is made in that act—is a declaration on your part, beloved, that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, that he is become your meat and your drink, that you feed at his table, and are his servants. There is something very solemn about the communion service, it ought never to be lightly entered upon, and when you have been attending to that ordinance in remembrance of him you should feel, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord in a very special manner by sitting at the table with his people."

Besides that, how often have we opened our mouth before God in *hymn-singing*. I am afraid that we do not always think enough about what we say when we sing. But what solemn things you have sung. Did you not sing the other day—

"And if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great
That I would give him all?"

And did you not sing —

"Had I ten thousand hearts, dear Lord,
I'd give them all to thee:
Had I ten thousand tongues, they all
Should join the harmony."

Ah, you have opened your mouth very widely unto the Lord in song.

And so, too, *in prayer*, both in the closet and in public. We say great things to God in supplication: do we always come up to what we say? Are we always of the mind of Jephthah, who said, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." Do we remember those vows which our soul in anguish made when we drew near to God in the bitterness of our Spirit, and poured out our complaint before him?

But ah, beloved, very specially I may speak of some here present who are my partners in the work and ministry of the church for her Lord. We who bear *public testimony*, "we have opened our mouths unto the Lord, and cannot go back." You who teach classes in the school, you who try to tell the gospel to other men in the workshop, you who talk of Jesus Christ even to your children—remember that you have committed yourselves. While you are trying to speak to others you make avowals for yourselves which bind you to present truth and future fidelity. As for me, whither could I flee from my Master's presence? Whither could I go from his service? Should I desert his ministry, unto what part of the earth could I go to hide myself? Somebody would remember this face which has been seen by so many thousands: the very tones of my voice would betray me, and men would point me out as an apostate from my Lord. Jonah might flee to Tarshish, but if I went to Tarshish some one or other would know me and pronounce my name as soon as I set foot upon the soil. I must fight this battle through now, retreat is out of the question. "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord" so often, and before so many, that I am bound by a myriad ties, nor would I wish to be bound with one the less, but daily with more and more. But, beloved friends, do remember that in proportion as your religion gains publicity, and in proportion as, by teaching others, you tacitly or avowedly declare your faith in the gospel, in that proportion you have opened your mouth unto the Lord, and it is not possible that you should go back without deep disgrace and dire destruction.

Now, it is worth our remembering *after what fashion we have done this*. I have shown you that we have opened our mouth unto the Lord, and I have shown you the occasions when we have done so, but in the very manner of the deed there has been practical force. We have done this *voluntarily*. We have opened our mouth to the Lord without any compulsion. The little child, you know, who according to the Prayer-book is made a member of Christ and a child of God, and so on, has nothing to do with the business, and is in no way responsible for what others choose to promise without its leave; but you and I did willingly what we did. We came forward and said, "Let me be baptized, for I am a believer in Jesus. Let me be united with the church, for I am one of the Lord's redeemed." We said to the Lord Jesus Christ, "I am cheerfully and willingly thy servant." We took upon ourselves the bonds of a Christian profession because we loved to do so. Well, then, if we have done this voluntarily, there is the strongest reason why we should not go back from our own chosen position as the Lord's own disciples.

And we did this *very solemnly*. Oh, to some of you it was indeed a devout action when you avowed yourselves on the Lord's side. Many

were the prayers and praises which preceded and followed it. Shall such solemnity be made into a falsehood? Shall the weeping and the supplication be proven to have been base hypocrisy?

I hope also that we did it very *deliberately*, counting the cost, looking round about, and seeing what it meant, and understanding what we were doing. We did not reckon upon a smooth path; we did not consider that we should gain crowns without crosses, or win victories without fightings; and we have found it much as we expected. We passed through the wicket-gate, and entered on the road to the celestial city, knowing that there were dragons to encounter, giants to fight, hills to climb, rivers to swim, and swamps to ford. We set out with considerable knowledge of what we were doing and what it involved, and we were not thereby prevented from decidedly and deliberately declaring ourselves to be on the Lord's side. Are we now going to confess ourselves to have been fools and dupes? Will we now tell our Lord that his service is hard and worthless?

Most of us made our profession *publicly*. We had many onlookers. We cannot forget that when we began the race a cloud of witnesses surrounded us, and have ever since kept us in full survey. If there is a little speck in our character they are sure to point it out. Never cat watched a mouse as the lynx-eyed world watches the Christian. How it magnifies and multiplies the faults of believers, and cries, "Aha! aha! so would we have it," the moment it finds the slightest trip or mistake. Well, we have opened our mouth to the Lord before multitudes, and shall we recant and deny the faith? Men and angels and devils know that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We have declared it before all with whom we have come into contact, not always in so many words, but I hope in our actions, by the decided stand that we have taken up for God and for Christ, and for truth, and for holiness, and for the fear of God in the land.

But the weight of it all lies in this,—“We have opened our mouth *unto the Lord*.” It is not what we promised the church, though in becoming members of it we have promised to fulfil the mutual duties of Christians. It was not what we promised to the minister, though, in the very fact of becoming members of a church of which he is the pastor, we have a Christian duty towards him. It was not what we promised one another, though we all owe something to each other. But we have opened our mouth *to the Lord*. If a man must trifle, let him trifle with men, but not with God. If promises to men may be lightly broken—and they should not be, yet let us not trifle with promises made to God. And if solemn declarations ever can be forgotten—which they should not be—yet not solemn declarations made to God. Beware, oh! beware of anything like levity in entering into covenant with the Most High. If a man should measure his footsteps and weigh his words when he appears before an earthly monarch, how much more when he stands before the King of kings, who is also Judge of quick and dead. There let thy words be few and guarded, but when thou hast once spoken them, and lifted thy hand to heaven, let thy promise stand, and do thou keep it faithfully, saying, “I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.”

II. But enough upon what we have done, for we want our full strength

of thought to dwell upon WHAT WE CANNOT DO. "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and *I cannot go back.*" That is to say, having once become Christians *we cannot apostatize from the faith.* We feel that we cannot, and God's servants in all ages have proved that they cannot. Men have threatened them, "You shall go to prison if you do not go back," but they have said "We cannot." And they have gone to prison, and they have said, like John Bunyan, "I will lie there till the moss grows on my eyelids, but I cannot—I cannot do other than God bids me." The enemy has said, "If you do not leave Christ you shall be stretched on the rack" and that means the pulling of every bone from its fellow: but in defiance of torture they have replied "We cannot go back: we can rather bear the rack." Poor women, like Anne Askew, have been racked most cruelly, but they could not go back. Then the enemies of the Lord have sworn, "We will burn you quick to the death." The saints have accepted that challenge also, and they have burned, and triumphed in the burning, clapping their blazing hands; for they could not go back. The young people in the old city of London, over the water there, went down to Smithfield in the early morning to see their pastor burned; and when they came home and their mother said, "What went you for?" the boys replied, "We went to learn the way." They wanted to know how to burn when their turn should come! Brave sons of brave sires! God's servants always have known how to burn, but they have not known how to turn. They have lifted their hand to the Lord, and if it involved losses, and crosses, and torture, and torment, and death, they could not go back. No, sir, if you can go back, you never knew Christ! If you can go back, he never marked the cross-mark on your heart, he never baptized you into his death; for, if he had so done a sacred impulse would be upon you, and you must go forward. As though you were a thunderbolt launched from the omnipotent hand you must go on, and burst through every opposition till you reach the end towards which God's eternal might is speeding you. You cannot go back.

Moreover, if we are right at heart we feel that we have lifted our hand to the Lord, and *we cannot go back, even by temporary turnings aside.* I do not mean that we do not do so, sadly too often; the Lord have mercy upon us for it. But it ought to be our solemn declaration that we cannot go back. Somebody says to you when you enter the workshop, "Ah, you are one of those fools of Christians." The devil tempts you to say that you are not, or at any rate to be very quiet about it. Do not fall into cowardly silence, but say at once, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back. I am in for it now. Whatever it means, I am enlisted and will never desert." Sometimes the temptation is, "Come with me, young man, come with me, young woman—to such and such questionable place of amusement." "Shall I go? Perhaps I shall not get much hurt." Stand still and say, "No, I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot go back, even if I had the desire to do so. I have committed myself to the pursuit of holiness, and I cannot go back to the foolish pleasures of sin." I like you young people to make a very straightforward profession of your faith, because it may be the means of keeping you in the hour of temptation; you will say to yourself, "The vows of the Lord are upon me;

how can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" I heard one say once, "I could not join the church because I should feel it such a tie." "Ay, but," I replied, "Brother, it is the sort of tie you need to feel." A profession of our faith in Jesus ought to be a very strong cord of love to hold us to that which is good, we ought to feel that the sacrifice is bound to the horns of the altar, but this bondage is true liberty to us, and pleasant to us, and it should be our desire to be bound faster and faster as long as we live. "I cannot go back" is an inability of the most desirable kind.

The enemies of your soul will attempt to persuade you to forsake the Lord, they will try ridicule and threats and bribes, but be you as a deaf man and hear them not. If you have really opened your mouth to God with all your heart, you cannot go back; the divine life within you will laugh to scorn all efforts of the foe. Baffled and discouraged, they will soon give up their wicked endeavours: they will see that it is of no use to tempt such an one as you are, your steadfastness and patient endurance will drive them from the field.

But there are some of you that make a profession, who attempt compromises, and go a little way with the world. If you go a furlong with the world you will soon go a mile I will give you a sentence to recollect:—"That man who is only half Christ's is altogether the devil's." Do remember that. He who is only half a Christian is altogether an unbeliever. As half clean is unclean, so half converted is unconverted, and half a saint is wholly a sinner. You cannot say to the world, "Hitherto thou shalt go, but no further," it is greedy, and seeks to win the whole man. To its imperious demands give a stern denial, saying, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

Now, what are our reasons why we cannot go back?

The first reason is that *if we did go back we should show that we have been altogether false until now*. You profess to be believers in Jesus Christ, you say that you have been born again, that you have received that inward principle which liveth and abideth for ever; if you go back to the world and to sin, you say to all mankind, "I made a hypocritical profession. I was a mere formalist. The root of the matter was not in me." You cannot say that; for you know you love the Lord. Even when you are in a doubting mood, you know you love Jesus. Though you question yourselves over and over again, you know that you love your Master. If you hear anybody finding fault with him, are you not sorely grieved? Oh, yes, it brings the blood into your cheeks, and you say, "I cannot bear to hear him spoken against." You thought that you did not love him, but the enemy provokes you to feel that you do love him. You do love him; you cannot say that you do not. Can you? And yet if you went back it would be tantamount to a declaration that all your former life had been a falsehood.

You cannot go back, dear friend, because *that were to act most basely*. Have you been bought with the precious blood of Christ, and will you go away from him? Did he die upon the cross for you, and will a little buffeting cause you to desert him? What! Did he fetch you up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay by his own death, and will you forsake him, and choose sinful ease and the praises of a wicked

world? Oh, it were baseness, abominable baseness, for a soul who once has tasted of his wondrous love, and seen him in his glory and death throes to desert Christ. No, *no*, NO; we cannot be so base as this, God helping us.

To go back from that for which we have opened our mouth to the Lord were to *incur frightful penalties*: for there is no judgment so great as that which is pronounced upon the apostate. If they have tasted of the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come—"if these shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." "Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its savour wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is henceforth good for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men." You know how many passages there are in which it is positively asserted that if a child of God did deliberately and totally apostatize, his restoration would be utterly impossible—not difficult, but *impossible*. This is one of the greatest proofs of the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, since there is no man in a condition in which it is impossible to save him, and yet any man would be in such a state if he apostatized. Therefore true believers shall not apostatize, but shall stand fast, and shall be kept even to the end. Yet, could they totally apostatize, they could never be restored again: the greatest remedy having already failed, there would remain no other. On the supposition that the power of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing influence of the blood of Jesus could not preserve the man from falling back into his unregenerate state, what else could be done for such? If regeneration fails—what then? If the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever can die—what then? Oh, we cannot go back! To go back is death, shame, eternal ruin.

And to go back would be *so unreasonable*. Why should I leave my Lord? Why should I let my Saviour go? In my heart of hearts I cannot think of a reason why I should forsake my Master. Do I seek pleasure? What pleasure is equal to that which he can give me? Do I seek gain? What gain could there be if I lost him? Do I seek ease? Ah, to leave him were to forfeit eternal rest. To whom should we go? That was a forcible question of the disciples when the Master enquired, "Will ye also go away?" They replied, "To whom can we go?" Ah, to whom can we go? If you give up the religion of Jesus Christ, what other religion would you have? If you were to give up the pleasures of godliness, what other pleasures would you have? "Oh," says one, "we could go into the world." Could you? Could you? If you are a child of God you are spoiled for the world. Before you became a Christian you could have done very well in the world, but now you know too much to be happy there. While the sow is a sow, the mud is good enough for her. Turn that sow into an angel, and if the angel has no place in heaven, where shall it go? It cannot go back to the sty. What could it do there? The wash of the trough was good enough for the sow, but the angel has eaten heavenly food. It cannot roll in the mire, nor consort with swine, it must have heaven or nothing. If you can go back to the world you will go back to the world; but if you are a child of God you cannot go back, because grace has so changed your nature that you would not be in an element in which you could exist.

There is no reason for apostasy; all the reasons lie the other way. "I

have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back," for this reason—that I have no inclination that way. Brethren, some of us have been Christians these five-and-twenty years, and we are glad of it. You know that in the army they have short-time soldiers and long-time soldiers. When I enlisted in Christ's army, I did not go in to enlist for a quarter of a year, and then have a new ticket; but I enlisted for life. But suppose my Master were to say to me, "Now, you have had some five-and-twenty years of it: you may now go home and cease from being one of my soldiers." "Ah, my Master, where should I go? Do not discharge me." If he were still to say, "You are out of your time, and may go home," I would tell him that I would not leave him in life or death. If I were put out at the front door I would come in at the back. Ah, my Lord, what anguish has that question stirred, whether I would also go as others have done. Go? Thou hast fastened me to thy cross and driven in the nails. I cannot go. Go? I am dead, and buried with thee; and thy rich grace has made me part and parcel of thyself by indissoluble union. "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" No, if I were discharged to-day, I would enlist again directly. The man who is married to a good wife thinks to himself, "If I had to marry again to-morrow morning, she should be the bride, and happy would we be." And so, if we had our choice to make again, we would choose our dear Lord over again, only with much more eagerness and earnestness than we did at first.

Dear friends, we have opened our mouth to the Lord, and we cannot go back because *we are so happy as we now are*. A man does not turn his back upon that which has become his life and his joy, he is bound to it by the bliss which he derives from it. Can the Swiss forget his country when he listens to the home music which he heard as a child amidst his native hills? Does not the home-sickness come over him so that he longs to be among the Alps again? Does not the Englishman, wherever he wanders, whether by land or sea, feel his heart instinctively turn to the white cliffs of Albion, and does he not say that with all her faults he loves his country still? Who would cease to be that which he loves to be? And so, now, our joy in Christ is great, and we cannot wish to be divided from him. Why should we? Shall the star desert the sphere in which it shines, or the fish the sea in which it lives? Shall the eagle abhor the craggy rock on which he builds his nest, or the angel shun the heaven in which he dwells? No, beloved, we cannot go back. Our joy holds us fast to our Lord.

And then, besides that, we cannot go back from what we have said, for *divine grace impels us onward*. There is a secret power more mighty than all other forces called the force of grace, and this has captured us. When the temptation comes to go back to Egypt, and we recollect the garlic,—that strong-smelling garlic, and the cucumbers,—those spongy, watery cucumbers, and we recollect the onions,—those pungent onions, the thought of going back to the fleshpots again comes upon us like a man of war; but mighty grace soon puts it down, drowns the desire in tears of repentance, and makes us loathe ourselves to think that we should be such fools as to think more of fleshpots than of manna, and more of cucumbers than of Canaan. Again we

resolutely press forward towards Canaan, blushing to think that we should have in heart turned back into Egypt. Grace will not let us return to our old bondage.

And there is another that holds us. It is he with the hands nailed to the tree. Whenever he is revealed in us we feel that we cannot go back. A sight of him with his face to the world's opposition, his face to the devil, his face to death, his face to hell, his face towards the wrath of God, and going through it all with boundless courage, makes us feel that we must go forward too, even till we enter into his rest. Brethren, by all these arguments we are moved to testify each one for himself, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

III. Now, the last thing of all is that, if this is the case, there is something WHICH WE MUST DO. What we must do is this—if there is a present sacrifice demanded of us we must make it directly, "I have opened my mouth to the Lord: I cannot go back." Now, if there is anything in your business, and you cannot be a Christian if you do it, abjure it at once and for ever. Do not question about it, and do not ask a friend what you shall do, but follow conscience. If you know the thing is right, do it. Do not ask mother, or brother, or the wisest man that ever lived; consult not with flesh and blood, but follow Jesus at all hazards. Do not take time for second thoughts, but do it, and have done with it. Oh, I have known Christians palter as to what they ought to do: their duty has been plain enough, but they have not liked it, and so they have wished for somebody to tell them that they might be Christians, and yet do wrong: to get some sort of excuse from the judgment of others they have gone fishing about to this and that minister, misrepresenting the circumstances to some extent, to gain the judgment they desired, till at last they have forged a sort of dispensation for sin from some good man's opinion, and then they have cheated their conscience by saying, "I feel much relieved. I can do it now, for I have consulted a gracious man, and he thinks I may." No consultation can be required where duty is plain.

"Oh, sir, but the sacrifice is great." If it were a thousand times greater, that does not enter into the question. Duty is imperative, and let it be done. If your doing right will make yourself and your children poor, so must it be. It were better that you were poor and yet maintained your integrity and continued in the service of God than that you should roll in riches by violating your conscience. Say, "I cannot go back": make the sacrifice, and go on.

If you are to do this, however, you must ask for more grace; and, dear brethren, wherever there is an ugly piece in the road, since you cannot go back, all you have to do is to ask the Lord to assist you over it, for you must go through it, and this can only be done by his strength. Recollect that your abiding faithful to the end does not depend upon yourself. You have to do it; but the Holy Spirit is to find you strength to do it. The negro said, "Massa, if the Lord say to Sambo, 'Sambo, jump through the brick wall,' I will jump. It is the Lord that will make me go through; but Sambo must jump." So it is with persevering in the face of difficulty and trouble. If you are bidden to a hard duty, and it involves sacrifice and hardship, do not hesitate, but advance unflinchingly; it is the Lord who bids you do it, and if the

Lord bids you go through the brick wall he will make a hole in it for you, or make it soft for you, or in some way or other make you equal to the occasion. Yours it is to go through; do not stand back because of your own weakness, but let faith lay hold on the divine strength.

One other admonition to Christian people is this—burn the boats behind you. When the Roman commander meant victory he landed his troops on the coast where he knew there were thousands of enemies, and he burned the boats, so as to cut off all chance of retreat. “But how are we to get away if we are beaten?” “That is just it,” said he; “we will not be beaten; we will not dream of such a thing.” “Burn the boats”—that is what you Christian people must do. “Make no provision for the flesh.” Let the separation between you and the world be final and irreversible. Say, “Here I go for Christ and his cross, for the truth of the Bible, for the laws of God, for holiness, for trust in Jesus; and never will I go back, come what may.”

This is the right spirit. The Lord send it among us more and more! It is the spirit of martyrs. You want it, you converted working men—you want the spirit of martyrs. I know how your workmates jest, and jeer, and torment you. Well, do not think yourself hardly done by, but play the man, and bear it all, and say to yourself, “I did not quite reckon on this, but it does not matter; I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back if it costs me everything.”

I will not talk to you longer; for what, after all, brethren, can religion cost us compared with what our salvation cost our Lord? What is it to go forward if we compare it with the glory that is beyond? A pin's-spick, that is all; and then you will be in heaven. Oh, to stand amongst the glorified!—to hear the Master say, “Well done!” One might die a thousand deaths to get those two syllables, if there were nothing else—“Well done!” To enjoy his smile, to share his crown, to stand amongst his palm-bearing hosts, and participate in his glory—this is worth all the difficulty and sacrifice involved in going forward, and ten thousand times more. Therefore accept this closing word. Forward, my brethren—forward! Whatever lies before you—the Red Sea or the rage of earth and hell combined—if God calls you, forward to it! He will bear you through to the glorious end. The Lord be with you, for Christ's sake! Amen!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Judges xi. 1—59.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—661, 674, 668.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

DAGON'S UPS AND DOWNS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him."—1 Samuel v. 2—4.

THE ark of the Lord was captured by the Philistines though it was guarded by all the men of arms that Israel could muster for the battle. It came to no hurt when it was surrounded by unarmed priests: although the times were exceedingly disturbed and perilous all through the dreary period of the Judges, yet never was the ark a captive till it was protected by the carnal weapon. When those whom God had ordained to take care of the ark of the covenant had it in charge it was safe enough; but when the proud banners of the State and the warlike array of the nation formed the body-guard of the sacred shrine the ark of God was taken. When the civil power was joined with the spiritual, and the arm of flesh came in to patronise and to take into connection with itself the arm of God's strength, then it was that the ark was borne away in triumph by its foes. All through human history you will find the explanation of this instructive fact: let God's truth alone, and it will take care of itself without the aid of kings and princes, laws or establishments, endowments or privileges. Only state the pure truth of revelation and it will force its own way, but garnish and adorn it by your eloquent language, or protect and guard it by your carnal wisdom and prudence, and the truth goes into captivity. Leave the church alone, O ye kings and princes, or persecute it if ye will, for it will laugh your opposition to scorn; but pretend not to propagate its doctrines by the civil power, for this is the worst curse that can befall it. Take it under your patronage, and the mere touch of your royal hands will create

disease within it. Almost to the death has the so-called "church" come down when her ministers, like Hophni and Phineas, have allied themselves with the temporal power; for God will do his work by his own instruments, and in his own way; he will not be indebted to the might of the flesh, but will defend his own glory by his own mysterious power. He uses for his instruments his consecrated ones who wear the white linen, which is the righteousness of saints, and not the blood-stained men of war arrayed in coat of mail and glittering breastplate of steel.

Another lesson may be learned from the incident before us. When the Philistines had beaten the Israelites in battle, and captured the sacred chest called the ark, they boasted and gloried as though they had defeated God himself. They evidently regarded the golden ephod as the very choicest part of the spoil, and they placed it as a trophy in the chief temple of their god Dagon, to show that he was mightier than the God Jehovah, who was unable, as they thought, to protect his people. This touched at once the honour of Jehovah, and because he is a jealous God this boded good for Israel. The fact that God is a jealous God has often a terrible side to us, for it leads to our chastisement when we grieve him: this, indeed, led to the defeat of Israel. But it has also a bright side towards us, for his jealousy flames against his foes even more terribly than against his friends; and when his name is blasphemed, and honours that are due to him are ascribed to a mere idol, or he is declared to have been defeated by a false god, then his jealousy burns like coals of juniper, and he makes bare his right arm to smite his adversaries, as he did on this occasion. He thinks it meet to punish his offending people, but when Philistia saith, "Dagon has defeated Jehovah," then the Lord will no longer suffer Philistia to triumph. Jehovah's answer to his foes was Dagon broken to shivers before his ark, and the Philistines plagued with emerods till, in their desperate pain and dire disgrace, they set free the ark, being no longer able to endure its presence in any of their towns; so that the Jews ever afterwards used to exasperate the Philistines by reminding them of the disease which so sorely tried them; and there is a dash of this in the psalm which saith of the Lord, "He smote his enemies in the hinder part; he put them to a perpetual reproach." Never did a boastful nation undergo a deeper dishonour in the eyes of their neighbours, to whom they became a laughing-stock, and never did an image suffer a worse disgrace than that which befell their god Dagon.

Now, then, whenever at any time infidelity or superstition shall so prevail as to discourage your minds, take you comfort out of this—that in all these God's honour is compromised. Have they blasphemed his name? Then he will protect that name. Have they gone further than they used to do in foul utterances against him? Then they will provoke him, and he will make bare his holy arm. I pray that they may so provoke him! All his church will say "Amen!" to that, so that he may arise and perform the glorious works of his strength and of his love among the sons of men, and put the adversary to confusion by proving that he is still with his people, and still the same mighty God as he was in the days of yore. Say you to yourselves, then, "Our Lord will not always endure this idolatrous popery, which is multiplying its priests

think our national church. His people cannot bear it; much less will he. He will not always tolerate these blasphemous theories, by which self-conceited, learned men and vainglorious sceptics seek to get rid of God out of this world. They will provoke him. He will bestir himself; he will show himself strong on the behalf of his truth, he will roll back the waves of sin, and let the ages know that he is still the great I AM, the victorious God over all, blessed for ever." Those two truths seem to us to lie upon the surface of this passage.

And now, though it would be very wrong to make out the word of God to be a mere set of allegories, and so to deny that it records facts—and him, I trust, we shall never do—yet, as the apostle Paul has shown us that many of the events in the Old Testament are an allegory, and as, indeed, these things are evidently types, and must be regarded as symbols and patterns of things that still occur—we shall use this passage in a spiritual way, and make it the channel of experimental teaching. Where the living God comes into the soul, Dagon, or the idol god of sin and worldliness, must go down. This is the one thought which we shall hammer out at this time.

I. To begin, then: THE COMING OF THE ARK INTO DAGON'S TEMPLE WAS AN APT SIMILE OF THE COMING OF CHRIST INTO THE SOUL.

Dagon, according to the best information, was the fish-god of Philistia; perhaps borrowed from the Sidonians and men of Tyre, whose main business was upon the sea, and who therefore invented a marine deity. The upper part of Dagon was a man or woman, and the lower part of the idol was carved like a fish. We get a very good idea of it from the common notion of the fictitious, fabulous creature called a mermaid. Dagon was just a merman or mermaid; only, of course, there was no pretence of his being alive. He was a carved image, like that which the papists worship and call the Blessed Virgin, or Saint Peter, or Saint Remy. The temple at Ashdod was, perhaps, the cathedral of Dagon, the chief shrine of his worship; and there he sat erect upon the high altar with pompous surroundings. The ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts was a small wooden box overlaid with gold, by no means a very cumbersome or bulky matter, but nevertheless very sacred, because it had a representative character, and symbolized the covenant of God: its capture was grievous indeed to pious Israelites, for they felt that the glory was departed when the ark was taken. The sacred chest was carried in triumph by the Philistines, and brought into the temple where Dagon stood. In your mind's eye you can see the fish-god high upon his throne, and the incense burning before him as the priests gather around, and the princes of Philistia with triumphant banners bow before his shrine. We hear the shouts of the Philistine lords as they bring in the golden coffer with the golden staves, and set it down at the foot of Dagon, and sing their exultant songs. Hear them as they sound their trumpets and chant their blasphemous hymns: "Glory be unto thee, O Dagon! thou hast triumphed this day, O mighty god of the land and the sea! Glorious fish-god, thou hast vanquished those who vanquished the Canaanites; and though their God slew the Egyptians of old, thou hast smitten them by their thousands. Glory be unto thee, thou mighty god!" Thus would they

extol their deity and pour contempt upon the captured ark, which they placed at the foot of the image. Then, when the service was over, and they had worshipped Dagon to their heart's content, they shut up the temple, and there was darkness in the holy place, or unholy place—which shall I call it? Not long did the ark remain where it was, with Dagon still supreme, but the mere incoming of the ark *into the idol temple was a fair picture of the introduction of the grace of God into the human heart.* The Philistines brought in the ark of the Lord, but only an act of divine power can bring the grace of God into the soul. By divers instrumentalities the truth as it is in Jesus is read, is heard, is brought to the recollection, is seen printed in the lives of men, and so enters into the temple of the inner manhood. When it first comes into the heart it finds sin enthroned there; and the Prince of Darkness reigning supreme. The first grace that enters into the soul finds it in darkness and in death, under the dominion of sin. Brethren, we have not to deliver ourselves from sin and death and darkness, and then obtain grace; but, while we are yet dead, grace visits us; while we are yet slaves the liberator comes; on our blackest midnight the sun of righteousness arises. While the Dagon of sin sits firmly on his throne, as if he never could be stirred, and his horrid form is alone to be seen lordling it over all the thoughts and imaginations of the heart, even then it is that "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins," sends his almighty grace to dwell within us. When that grace enters the soul it comes not with observation, and sin at the first does not know any more about the incoming of grace than Dagon knew about the ark. The grace, the light, the truth, the love of God come into the soul, and the man does not know as yet what the Lord has done for him. He is only conscious of some impression, of a thoughtfulness he had never known before, of a calm frame of mind, of a desire to consider eternal things; and that is all that he perceives of the Lord's work within him. His Dagon seems to be there in as supreme a majesty as ever, only something strange is also within the mind, the man knows not what it is. It is the beginning of the end—of a blessed and glorious end.

We have now Dagon and the ark in the same temple, sin and grace in the same heart, *but this state of things cannot long abide.* No man can serve two masters, and even if he could then two masters would not agree to be so served. The two great principles of sin and grace will not abide in peace with each other, they are as opposite as fire and water. There will be a conflict and a victory, and we know which will conquer, for as surely as ever the grace of God comes into the soul sin receives notice to quit. That night, when the Philistines had finished their exulting ceremonies, they thought they had left Dagon robed in glory, reigning and triumphing over the ark of the Lord. They had scarcely shut the doors and gone before Dagon fell on his face to the ground before the ark. Down he went. He did not lean over, but *he fell*, nor did he drop upon his side, but he was made to do obeisance before the ark, for he fell *on his face*; and he did not fall part of the way merely, but fell on his face *to the ground* before the ark: a change of positions very significant to his worshippers! The ark was set at the foot of Dagon, and now Dagon lies before the ark as if he were

prostrating himself in worship before the great and mighty God. Even thus grace in the soul is not long before it overthrows sin. What a turning of things upside down grace always makes! The watchword is, "Overturn, overturn, overturn." The Breaker is come up, and the images of man's invention must be dashed to shivers.

Very likely your Dagon is in the shape of *self-righteousness*. I shall call it Dagon, for it is nothing better: one of the worst idols in the whole world is the idol of self. The self-righteous man boasts that he is as good as other people, if not rather better, although he is not a Christian. He does not know that he has ever done anything very wrong, and he feels that in him there is a great deal that is very good and excellent, and therefore he expects that things will go well with him at last. He has a very fine figure-head for his god, and though there may be a rather "fishy" tail to his character, he keeps that as much out of sight as possible, and conceals it with excuses. The god of his self-confidence is a very pretty thing, take it for all in all; it is beautiful as a mermaid, and he is fascinated with its beauty. He bows before his idol and sings before it that ancient canticle of the Philistines—I mean the Pharisees—which begins, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are!" When grace enters the soul the dominion of self-confidence comes to an end, down goes the fish-god on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the man discovers that he has no such righteousness as that wherein he trusted. He begins 'to bemoan his sins and to lament his shortcomings. A perfect change of feeling has come over him. He loathes himself as much as he once admired himself; and now, instead of taking the highest seat in the synagogue, he is willing to be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord. "Ah, me!" says he, "what a sinner I am! how vile in the sight of God!" See you not how this brave Dagon has gone down on his face to the ground before the ark.

Perhaps the man never had much of this vainglorious self-righteousness, but he served the Dagon of *besetting and beloved sin*. The man was a drunkard, Bacchus ruled him: but as soon as the grace of God is brought into his soul he has done with the drink-god. The horrible Dagon of drunkenness is hurled from its throne by grace. The man cannot bear to think that he should have so disgraced himself as to be fond of wantonness, and chambering, and surfeiting, and drunkenness, and such-like abominable sins, which bring manhood below the level of the beast. He who is truly penitent hates the very name of these filthy sins. If a man has been guilty of using bad language and profane swearing, the grace of God generally cures him of that at once. I have heard men who had lived in the practice of swearing for many years say that, from the time they were converted, they never had a temptation to it; that black sin went off bag and baggage at once. Some sins are slow in dying, but profanity generally gives up the ghost without a struggle. John Bunyan says that a stone from the battering-ram slew Mr. Profane by cracking his skull, so that he died early in the siege of Mansoul; it were well if more deceptive sins did the like. The grosser outward offences, like Dagon, are soon down before the ark.

Sin of every sort is bowed low before triumphant grace. Yea, and the man who receives the grace of God feels that the love of any and every

sin is cast out of its place in his heart. Now he desires to be quit of it all, and anxiously cries, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" He will no more go and live in sin, as he did before, than Paul will continue to be a persecutor after the Lord, even Jesus, has appeared to him by the way. What a Dagon-fall there was in the apostle's pride just outside the Damascus gate! Such a fall takes place in the heart of every man to whom the grace of God comes with power.

Now the parallel may be run a little further. *This fall of Dagon very soon began to be perceived*, for "When they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen on his face to the earth." Very soon after the entrance of grace this sign follows, and ere long it is seen and known. Let no man conceive that there is grace in his soul if Dagon sits on the throne still. This is one of the earliest tokens of the entrance of the life of God into the soul—that sin falls down from its high place, and is no more had in honour.

At the same time, observe that Dagon was not broken. He had fallen on his face, but that was all; so that the next day his foolish worshippers could set him up again. Sometimes at the first entrance of grace there is a downfall of sin, but nothing like such a breaking and destroying of sin in the soul as there will be afterwards. When the divine life has entered sin is dethroned, it no longer sits up there in the place of God; but yet, for all that, there is an awful power remaining in the corrupt nature, a deadly tendency to sin, a powerful law in the members bringing the soul into captivity. Still, down the idol goes, even if it be not broken: it cannot reign, though it may remain to trouble us.

Now, what happened on the night mentioned in the text? *Dagon fell before the ark when it was all quiet and still in the temple.* While the worshippers were there, during the day, there was noise, and shouting, the false god sat aloft and you could not tell that there was any mysterious power about the ark. It was in the quiet of the night that this deed was done, and thus often in the hearing of the word grace is introduced into the heart, but you would not know that any change was wrought, for it is only when the man gets away from the world's business—gets alone and begins to consider—that a divinely-mysterious might is displayed by the inward grace, so as to sink sin, and lay the power of evil low. Would to God our hearers took more opportunities for quietly considering the word of God! How much more blessing might often be gotten out of sermons and books if there were more meditation! You get the grapes, but you do not tread them in the wine-vat. There is more trouble taken to collect the sheaves of the sermon than is afterwards expended in threshing them out. The power which smote Dagon was displayed in the quiet of the night; and when the grace of God has entered into your souls it is probable that the downcoming of sin will be better effected in times of quiet thought and searching of heart than at any other period. Thought is the channel of immense benefit to the soul. Shut the temple doors and let all be still, and then will the Holy Ghost work wonders in the soul.

II. Now, secondly, THE SETTING UP OF DAGON THE SECOND TIME, AND HIS SECOND FALL, VERY WELL REPRESENT THE BATTLE GOING ON IN THE SOUL BETWEEN SIN AND GRACE.

What fools these Philistines were to continue worshipping, a god

which when it tumbled down could not get up again. To worship a god which fell on its face was bad enough, but to worship one that could not rise when he fell, but needed to be set in his place by human hands, was certainly vile infatuation : but they took up their precious deity, and they put him in his place again, and no doubt sang a special "high mass" to him, and then went their way quietly to their homes, little dreaming that their pretty fish-god would want their help again so soon. Even thus *Satan and the flesh come into our souls and try to set our fallen Dagon up again, with some measure of success.* It often happens that in young converts there comes a period when it looks as if they had altogether apostatized and gone back to their former ways. It seems as if the work of God were not real in their souls, and Grace was not triumphant. Do you wonder at it? I have ceased to wonder. The gospel is preached, and the man accepts it, and there is a marvellous difference in him ; but when he goes among his old companions, although he is resolved not to fall into his former sins, they try him very severely. He is assailed in a thousand ways ! Some of our young people, if they were to tell their story, would harrow up your feelings by mentioning the way in which all sorts of jests, and insinuations, and taunts are hurled at them, and that by influential persons—their parents, their older brothers and sisters, and those who oversee their work ; they are beset behind and before, so that if they do not transgress in one way, it is very likely that the devil craftily trips them up in another. I have known a man when he has been tempted to go into evil company refuse again, and again, and again. His tempters have laughed at him, and he has borne it all, but at last he has lost his temper ; and as soon as the enemies have seen his passion boiling up they have cried out, "Ah, there you are ! We have got you." At such a time as that the poor man is apt to cry, "Alas, I cannot be a believer, or else I should not have done this." Now, all this is a violent attempt of Satan and the flesh to set Dagon up again. They know that the Lord has thrown him down and they cannot bear it, but would fain set the fish-god again on his throne. Sometimes they do for a time set Dagon up again and cause great sorrow in the soul. I have known a poor lost lamb to be found and brought into the fold ; but it has miserably wandered for a time, and the devil has thought that, surely, he had got that lamb, and would tear him into pieces, and yet he has been deceived after all. Dagon was only set up for a time, and he had to come down again ; and so it happens wherever grace enters the heart. The wanderers have come back, weeping and sighing, to own that they have dishonoured their profession : and what has been the result in the long run? Why, they have had more humility, more tenderness of heart, more love to Christ, more gratitude, than they had before ; and I have been glad (not glad that they wandered, but glad) that the grace of God, when he has brought them back again more fully, has given them a deeper conversion and a more lasting and substantial work of grace, so that afterwards they have continued by the grace of God honourable, useful Christians even to the end. Often and often is that the case, and I speak at this time to my young convert who can say in his heart, "O sir, I do love the Lord, but I have been such a backslider. I do trust Jesus. I wish to be a Christian, but I have been overthrown by enemies, I fear I must

not join a Christian church, because if I could not resist temptation for six weeks how could I expect to stand fast all my life? I am such a poor, weak creature, so apt to be led astray, what is to become of me?" Dear friend, grieve to think you were so foolish, but do not doubt the power of God's Holy Spirit to help you, and to break in pieces the enemy, who seems to have resumed his power over you.

Now, notice that *although they again set Dagon up, he had to go down again with a worse fall.* I have no doubt it took them a long pull and a great heave to haul the uncomely lump of marble into its place again. Many strong limbs were tired, and muscles strained, to lift up the huge god, and set him on his pedestal; but it was no trouble to the Lord to upset the ugly stone. No rope was wanted, and no straining or pulling. "Bel boweth down and Nebo stoopeth" when Jehovah upsets himself. Only shut the temple gates, and leave the ark and Dagon to have it out between them, and Dagon gets the worst of it. Only, mark this, Dagon has not gained much by being reinstated, for this time, when he comes down, behold he was fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Jehovah, "and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold." The idol's *head* was gone, and even so the reigning power of sin is utterly broken and destroyed, its beauty, its cunning, its glory are all dashed to atoms. This is the result of the grace of God, and the sure result of it, if it once comes into the soul, however long the conflict may continue, and however desperate the efforts of Satan to regain his empire. O believer, sin may trouble thee, but it shall not tyrannize over thee. "Sin shall not have dominion over you," saith the Holy Spirit, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace." If the power of evil be set up for awhile it shall only come down with the greater force, and its head shall be cut off.

Then, too, the *hands* of Dagon were broken off, and even thus the active power, the working power of sin is taken away. Both the palms of the idol's hands were cut off upon the threshold, so that he had not a hand left. Neither right-handed sin nor left-handed sin shall remain in the believer when God's sanctifying grace fetches Dagon down. The secret reigning power is broken, and so is the manifest working power. The Christian is kept from putting forth his hand into iniquity. He is crucified with Christ, and so both hands are nailed to the cross and fastened up from performing those deeds of ill towards which the lustings of the flesh would urge him.

This happened, too, if you notice, very speedily; for we are told a second time that, when they arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face. It does not take grace long, when it is once in the soul, to overturn the reigning power and the active energy of sin, when these for a while appear to get the upper hand. Brothers and sisters, I hope you know this. I hope that the Spirit of God which is in you, and the love of Christ which reigns in you, have destroyed the power which sin once had in your souls. If it be not so, then question yourselves whether the Spirit of God be in you at all. It is not possible that the ark should be in the temple and that Dagon should be standing there unbroken. Not till the morrow morning shall evil remain unchallenged and unmoved upon the throne. It is not possible that you, dear friend, could live and delight in sin, and yet be a child of God.

If your heart is set upon iniquity, where your heart is there your treasure is, and if sin be your treasure you are no heir of heaven. That which governs your heart is your lord and your god; what your heart loves, by that you shall be judged, and if you love evil you shall be condemned. We may sin—ah, would God we did not!—but to love sin is not in the believer. There is a deadly antagonism between grace and sin; and where the gracious life comes the evil life must fall. There cannot be an alliance between Dagon and the ark, between God and the world, or between Christ and sin.

III. And now, thirdly, the parallel still holds good in one more point, namely, that **THOUGH THE FISH-GOD WAS THUS MAIMED AND BROKEN, YET THE STUMP OF DAGON WAS LEFT TO HIM.**

The original Hebrew is, "Only Dagon was left to him," or "only the fish": only the fishy part remained. The head and the upper portions were broken away, there remained only the fishy tail of Dagon, and that was all; but that was not broken. Now, *this is the business which brings us so much sorrow*—that the stump of Dagon is left to him. I wish it were not. I have heard some say that they have no sin remaining in them. Well, dear brother, the Lord convert you! I shall say no more than that, for if there were in you enough light for you to perceive your darkness, it were better than to talk as you do. Every child of God who knows anything about himself and the experience of a real believer, knows that there is indwelling sin in him, and that to a most fearful extent, so as to make his very soul cry out in agony, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" I could not go the length of singing, with Ralph Erakine, as a description of myself, the lines written by him in his "Believer's Sonnets"—

"To good and evil equal bent,—
And both a devil and a saint."

But yet, taken with a large lump of salt, there is a good deal of truth even in that unguarded expression. There is the old corruption within us, and there is no use denying it, because denying it will put us off our guard, will make many of the puzzles of life to be quite unanswerable, and often bring upon us great confusion of soul. The other law is within us as well as the law of grace. Canst thou draw near to God, my brother, and not see that he can justly charge thee with folly? Canst thou stand in his presence, as Job did, and behold his glory, and not say, "I abhor myself in dust and ashes"? Canst thou have dealings with perfection, and not perceive thy faultiness? Canst thou come near unto the innermost court of the temple, and stand in that excessive light of fellowship which is the portion of the Lord's chosen, and not see within thyself spots and wrinkles, yea, thousands of them, so as to make thee cover thy face for shame, and adore the amazing grace which loves thee still? Canst thou not see in thy daily life enough to condemn thee, and cast thee into hell, were it not that God still sees thee in Christ, and imputes not thy iniquity to thee, but accepts thee in the Beloved? Oh, it is so—it is so, indeed! The stump of Dagon is still left; and because it is left, dear friends, *it is a thing to be watched against*, for though that stony stump of Dagon would not grow in the

Philistine temple; yet they would make a new image, and erect it again, and bow before it as before. Alas, the stump of sin within us is not a slab of stone, but full of vitality, like the tree cut down, of which Job said, "At the scent of water it will bud." Leave the sin that is in you to itself, and let temptation come in the way, and you shall see that which will blind your eyes with weeping. It is a good thing to look in your face in a glass, but your face is not yourself; no mirror can show you yourself. There is a certain temptation which has an affinity to the evil within you; and should Satan bring that temptation near you will see yourself to your horror and shame. There shall then look out of the window of your countenance a man whom you did not see when you looked in the glass, for you only saw the house he lived in. So ugly is he that he makes the very house he lives in look horrible. When the angry man comes up, and is visible to the naked eye, how he deforms the countenance! When obstinate old Adam comes to the window, what a dark forbidding face he wears! When that envious spirit comes up, what an evil glance there is in the eye! When the unbelieving spirit peers through the lattice, what a miserable countenance he shows compared with the face of faith and childlike confidence in God! There is nobody in this world, dear brother, that you have so much cause to be afraid of as yourself. Augustine used to pray, "Lord, deliver me from that evil man, myself." A very appropriate prayer for a woman, too—"Lord, save me from myself." If you are saved from yourself you will be saved from the devil; for what can the devil do unless self joins hands with him in unholy league? But, oh, what watchfulness it will need! Here is room for faith indeed! Faith does not decline the conflict, nor puff us up with the notion that the fight is over; on the contrary, it takes to itself the whole armour of God, because it sees the battle to be still raging. Faith is wanted to be the shield to keep off the fiery darts, and the sword with which to smite the foe. Here is the sphere in which faith is to work; it does not talk of ended warfare, but carries on the life-long campaign to ultimate victory. Faith does not say, "I have ceased the conflict": she knows better: faith says, "I am in the midst of it, warring with a thousand foes, and looking for the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord." O brothers and sisters, be strong in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, for you have need to be so, since the stump of Dagon still remaineth. The lusting of the flesh abideth still in the regenerate.

Look at this matter again. That stump of Dagon which remained was a vile thing: it was a piece of an idol, a fragment of a monstrous image which had been worshipped instead of God. Now, the sin which dwelleth in you is never to be regarded by you as anything else than a horrible, loathsome, and detestable thing. That after such love as you and I have known there should be in us even the power to be ungrateful ought to shock us; that after such proof of his truth as God has shown to us, after such faithfulness and such abundant evidences of faithfulness, we should still be capable of unbelief ought to be a sorrow to us. Oh, I wish I could never sin again throughout time or eternity. Oh, that every particle of the tinder of depravity into which the devil could let a spark fall was gone from my nature. It is a

mercy to have the sparks put out, but it is a pity to have even the tinder left; and there is plenty of this tinder about us all. Tinder? Ay, gunpowder, so quick is it to take the light which Satan is ever ready to bring. We carry a bomb-shell heart about with us, and we had better keep clear of all the devil's candles lest there should be an explosion of eternal sin. These candles are common enough in the form of some plausible but sceptical friend, or in the form of amusements which are questionable. Keep you clear of Lucifer's matches. You have got enough mischief in your heart without going where you will get more. If anybody here feels that he is so very gracious and good that he can safely enter into temptation, I am sure that he is labouring under a very great mistake. I would say to him, Brother, there is devil enough in you without your sending out invitation cards to seven more. Go you to him that casteth out devils. Go you into company where the powers of evil will be held in chains and bound; but do not go where other devils as wicked as himself will call to the demon who now besets you, and stir him up to work mischief. The stump of Dagon is left. Be careful, watchful, prayerful, and loathe sin with all your soul.

IV. But now, lastly, here is mercy, that **THOUGH THE STUMP OF DAGON WAS NOT TAKEN OUT OF THE PHILISTINE TEMPLE, WE MAY GO BEYOND THE HISTORY AND REJOICE THAT IT WILL BE TAKEN FROM OUR HEARTS.** The day is coming, brother, sister, in which there will be no more inclination in you to sin than there is in an angel. The day is coming in which your nature shall be so established in truth and righteousness and holiness that all the devils in hell will not be able to make you think a wrong thought. "Oh," says one, "I wish that time would come soon." It will come, brother. The Lord will keep you fighting yet and warring yet; but there will come a day when a messenger will wait at your door, and he will say, "The pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern. Thy flesh must return to the dust, and thy spirit to God that made it," and then your spirit shall open its eyes with glad surprise and find itself delivered from the body, and at the same time delivered from all sin. There shall also come by-and-by the sound of the trumpet of resurrection, and the body shall rise; and one of the chief characteristics of the risen body will be that as it rises it will be free from the bondage of corruption, and it will have no tendency to lead us into sin. When our perfected spirit shall enter into our perfect body, then our complete manhood, body, soul, and spirit shall have no stain, or spot, or flaw. All its past sin will be washed away—nay, is washed away—in the blood of the Lamb, and all its propensities, tendencies and inclinations to sin shall all be gone for ever, and the very possibilities of sinning shall be eternally taken away.

"No cloud those blissful regions know,
For ever bright and fair;
For sin, the source of mortal woe,
Can never enter there."

John Bunyan represents Mercy as laughing in her sleep. She had a dream, she said; and she laughed because of the great favours which were yet to be bestowed upon her. Well, if some of you were to dream

to-night that the great thing which I have spoken of had actually happened to you, so that you were completely free from all tendency to sin, would not you also be as them that dream and laugh for very joy. Think of it—no more cause for watchfulness, no more need of weeping over the day's sin before you fall asleep at night; no more sin to confess, no devil to tempt you, no worldly care, no lusting, no envy, no depression of spirit, no unbelief, nothing of the kind—will not this be a very large part of the joy of heaven? Why, I am ready to cry for joy to think that this will happen to me, unworthy though I be. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." It will be so, brother, both to you and to me. As surely as we have trusted Christ he will perfect that which concerneth us.

"The feeblest saint shall win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way."

The Lord has undertaken our perfect sanctification, and he will accomplish it. He has brought old Dagon down, and broken his head and his hands, and he will break him to shivers ere long. Yea, he will take the ark of the Lord away where Dagon shall never come into contact with it any more. He will take you—the gracious part of you, your truest and best self—away into the glory, to abide with him for ever. Think of this and sing. Yea, brother, sing with all your might, for all this may happen within a week. A week? It may happen within a day. It may happen before you reach home to-night. We are so near to heaven that if we were not very dull, and our ears very heavy, we might at once hear the angels chanting their ceaseless hallelujahs. Some of God's saints—some here, perhaps—have almost got their feet upon the threshold of the eternal city, and do not know it. They are closer than they think to the harp and the palm branch. They would not fret about what they will do next year, they would not be worrying about next quarter-day if they knew that they would be amongst the royalties of heaven by then. They would not even think about to-morrow did they know how soon it will all be over, and how soon the eternal joy will begin.

God bless you, dear friends. May the Lord's grace reign over all in the power of the Holy Ghost; and even to sinners in whom sin is triumphant may Jesus Christ come, and his grace enter, and then their beloved sins must fall. To the one only living and true God be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans vii. 18—25; and Romans viii. 1—14.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—377, 648, 681.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE JEWEL OF PEACE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 18TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all."—2 Thessalonians iii. 16.

WHEN the heart is full of love it finds the hand too feeble for its desires. Hence it seeks relief in intercession and benediction; wishing, praying and blessing where it cannot actually effect its loving purpose. The apostle would have done for the Thessalonians all the good that was conceivable had it been in his power, but his wishes far outstripped his abilities, and therefore he betook himself to interceding for them, and to invoking upon them the blessing of the Lord and Master whom he served. Here is a lesson for us in the art of doing good; as we lengthen the eyesight with the telescope, as we send our words afar by the telegraph, so let us extend our ability to do good by the constant use of intercessory prayer. Parents, when you have done all you can for your children yourselves, be thankful that you may introduce them to a further and greater blessing, by commending them to the care of the great Father in heaven. Friends, do your friends the best possible deed of friendship by asking for them the friendship of God. You who love the souls of men, when you have poured out all your strength on their behalf, bless God that there is still something more which you can do, for by earnest entreaties and supplications you may bring down from on high the effectual energy of the Holy Spirit, who can work in their hearts that which it is not in your power to accomplish. The apostle saw that the Thessalonians were much troubled, and he wrote the most encouraging words to cheer them, but he knew that he could not take the burden from off their hearts, and therefore he turned to the God of all consolation, and prayed him to give them peace always by all means. The slenderness of our power to bless others will be no detriment to them if it lead us to lay hold upon the eternal strength, for that will bring into the field a superior power to bless, and our infirmity will only make space for the display of divine grace.

No. 1,343-4.

Let us look first at *the many-sided blessing* which the apostle invokes—peace; and then let us note *the special desirableness of it*. Thirdly, let us observe *from whom alone it comes*; and fourthly, note *the wide sweep of the apostolic prayer*.

I. First, then, let us look at **THE MANY-SIDED BLESSING**,—"The Lord of peace himself give you peace." Some have thought to restrict the expression to peace within the church, since disorderly members were evidently increasing among the Thessalonians; but that is a very straitened and niggardly interpretation, and it is never wise to narrow the meaning of God's word. Indeed, such a contracted explanation cannot be borne, for it does not appear that the disorderly persons mentioned in the chapter had as yet created any special disturbance; they had been quietly fattening at the expense of their generous brethren and would not be very eager to quarrel with the rack from which they fed. Although no doubt church quiet is included as one variety of peace, yet it would be a sad dwarfing of the meaning of the Spirit to consider one phase of the blessing to the neglect of the rest. No, the peace here meant is "the deep tranquillity of a soul resting on God," the quiet restfulness of spirit which is the peculiar gift of God, and the choicest privilege of the believer. "Great peace have all they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them."

The peace of the text is a gem with many facets, but in considering its many-sidedness we must remember that its main bearing is *toward God*. The deepest, best, and most worthy peace of the soul is its rest towards the Lord God himself. I trust we know this, and are enjoying it at this moment. We are no longer afraid of God: the sin which divided us from him is blotted out, and the distance which it created has ceased to be. The atonement has wrought perfect reconciliation and established everlasting peace. The terrors of God's law are effectually removed from us, and instead thereof we feel the drawings of his love. We are brought nigh by the atoning sacrifice, and have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We know that all his thoughts to us are thoughts of love, and we bless his name that our thoughts toward him are no longer those of the slave towards a taskmaster, or of a criminal towards a judge, but those of a beloved child towards a kind and tender father. Fervent love reigns in our hearts, casting out all fear and causing us to joy in God by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a great blessing. It is surely a choice delight for a man to know that whether he prospers or is afflicted, whether he lives or dies, there is nothing between God and him but perfect amity; for all that offends has been effectually put away.

Beloved, when the apostle wishes us peace in the words of our text, he no doubt means that our hearts should be at perfect peace, by being placed fully in accord with the will of God; for, alas, we have known some, who we hope are forgiven and are God's children, who nevertheless quarrel with God very sadly. They are not pleased with what he does, but even complain that he deals hardly with them: they are naughty children, and carry on a sort of sullen contention with their Heavenly Father, because he does not indulge them in all their whims and fancies. Now may the Lord of peace put an end to all such grievous warfare of heart in his people. May you love the Lord as well

and trust him so fully that you could not pick a quarrel with him, even if he smote you and bruised you and broke your bones. Whatever he does is not only to be accepted with submission, but to be rejoiced in. That which pleases him should please us. Then have we perfect peace when we can magnify and praise the Lord even for the sharp cuts of his rod, and the fierce fires of his furnace. May the Lord bring us into this state, for there is no joy like it; perfect peace with God is heaven below.

Yea, brethren, we reach a little further than reconciliation and submission, for we come into the enjoyment of conscious complacency. There are men who are at peace with God as to the forgiveness of sin, and in a measure are in accord with his will, but they are not walking carefully in the path of obedience, and so they are missing the sense of divine love. God is their Father, and he loves them, but he hides his face from them; they walk contrary to him, and so he walks contrary to them. We cannot consider such a condition to be one of the fullest peace. The truly restful state of mind is enjoyed when the heart and life are daily cleansed by grace, so that there is nothing to grieve the Spirit of God, and therefore the Lord feels it right to favour his child with the light of his countenance in full meridian splendour. O how blessed to bask in the sunlight of Jehovah's love, free from all doubt, and having no more conscience of sin! In that sense of conscious favour lies the rest of heaven. May the Lord of peace himself give us this peace.

Peace because sin is forgiven, is the sweet fruit of justification—"therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Peace because the heart is renewed and made to agree with the will of God is the blessed result of sanctification, for "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Peace, because the soul is conscious of being the object of divine love, is a precious attendant upon the spirit of adoption, which is the very essence of peace. Brethren in Christ, may this threefold peace with God be with you always.

Now we look further and note that this peace spreads itself abroad and covers *all things* with its soft light. God is great, and filleth all things, and he who becomes at peace with him is at peace with all things else. Being reconciled to God, the believer says,—All things are mine, whether things present or things to come; all are mine, for I am Christ's and Christ is God's. Behold the Lord has made us to be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field are at peace with us. Providence is our pavilion, and angels are our attendants. All things work together for our good, now that we love God and are the called according to his purpose. No longer are we afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction which wasteth at noonday. Behold the Lord God covereth us with his feathers, and under his wings do we trust; his truth is our shield and buckler: because we have set our love upon him he doth deliver us, and he doth set us on high because we have known his name. At peace with the Lord of hosts we are at peace with all the armies of the universe, in alliance with all the forces which muster at Jehovah's bidding. Though we must be at war with Satan, yet even he is chained and made as a slave

to accomplish purposes of good contrary to his own will. There is neither in heaven nor earth nor hell anything that we need fear when we are once right with God. Settle the centre, and the circumference is secure : peace with God is universal peace.

This practically shows itself in the Christian's inward peace with regard to *his present circumstances*, be they what they may. Being at peace with God he sees the Lord's hand in everything around him, and is content. Is he poor? The Lord makes him rich in faith, and he asks not for gold. Is he sick? The Lord endows him with patience, and he glories in his afflictions. Is he laid aside from the holy service which he so much loves? He feels that the Lord knows best. If he might be actively engaged in doing God's will he would be very thankful, and run with diligence the race set before him; but if he must lie in the hospital, and suffer rather than serve, he does not wish to put his own wishes before the will of his Master, but he leaves himself in the Lord's hands, saying, "Lord, do as thou wilt with me. I am so at peace with thee that if thou use me I will bless thee, and if thou lay me aside I will bless thee: if thou spare my life I will bless thee, and if thou bring me down to the grave I will bless thee; if thou honour me among men I will bless thee, and if thou make me to be trodden under foot like straw for the dunghill I will still bless thee: for thou art everything, and I am nothing, thou art all goodness and I am sin and emptiness." The soul which thus has perfect peace as to all its personal surroundings is indeed happy; it is lying down in green pastures beside the still waters.

Blessed be God this peace is mainly to be found *in the soul itself* as to its own thoughts, believings, hopings, expectations, and desires. We have not only peace towards the outer world, but peace within. After all, happiness and peace lie more within the man than in anything about him. Heaven lies more in the heart than in golden streets, and hell's flame consists rather in man's tortured conscience than in the Tophet fire which the breath of God has kindled. So the peace which Jesus gives is within us; "the good man is satisfied from himself." Some minds are strangers to peace. How can they have peace, for they have no faith? They are as a rolling thing before the whirlwind, having no fixed basis, no abiding foundation of belief. These are the darlings of the school of modern thought, whose disciples set themselves as industriously to breed doubt as if salvation came by it. Doubt and be saved is their gospel, and who does not see that this is not the gospel of peace? Forsooth they are receptive, and are peering about for fresh light, though long ago the Sun of Righteousness has arisen. Such uncertainty suits me not. I must *know* something or I cannot live: I must be sure of something or I have no motive from which to act. God never meant us to live in perpetual questioning. His revelation is not and cannot be that shapeless cloud which philosophical divines make it out to be. There must be something true, and Christ must have come into the world to teach us something saving and reliable; he cannot mean that we should be always rushing through bogs and into morasses after the will-of-the-wisp of intellectual religion. There is assuredly some ascertainable, infallible, revealed truth for common people; there must be something sure to rest upon. I know that it is so, and declare unto you what I have heard and seen. There are great truths which the Lord

has engraven upon my very soul, concerning which all the men on earth and all the devils in hell cannot shake me. As to these vital doctrines, an immovable and unconquerable dogmatism has laid hold upon my soul, and therefore my mind has peace. A man's mind must come to a settlement upon eternal truths by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, or else he cannot know what peace is.

I would ask for every one of my brethren that they may find an anchorage of mind and heart and never leave it. We have been often spoken of as an old-fashioned church, and your minister is said to be *Ultimus Puritanorum*, the last of the Puritans, a man incapable of any thought beyond the limit of the old-fashioned theology. I bless the Lord that it is even so. I am indeed incapable of forsaking the gospel for these new-fangled theories. Down went my anchor years ago: it was a great relief to me when I first felt it grip, and it is a growing joy to me that I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him. Pretensions to original thought I have never made. I invent nothing, I only tell the old, old story as God enables me. "Ah," said a certain divine to me one day, "it must be very easy to you to preach because you know what you are going to say; your views are fixed and stereotyped. As for me," he said, "I am always seeking after truth, and I do not know one week what I may preach the next." Thus speak the teachers—do you wonder if the disciples wander into scepticism? Has the Lord taught the man nothing of sure truth? Then let him wait till he has received his message. Till he knows the gospel in his own heart experimentally as the power of God unto salvation let him sit on the penitent form and ask to be prayed for, but never enter a pulpit. What are the churches at to tolerate these sowers of infidelity? Time was when the fathers in our Israel would have chased from their pulpits those who glory in the unbelief which is their shame. May the Lord of peace himself give you peace as to your personal beliefs and convictions, and then when you get into deep waters of trial and sorrow you will say, "Ah, I did believe the right doctrine after all. I can feel the grip of my anchor on the things unseen. I have not been deceived. I have not followed cunningly devised fables, for the promise is true and I feel the power of it, it sustains and cheers and comforts me under all my trials, and I know that it will do so even to my dying hour." May every troubled thinker find the peace of faith and never lose it.

Many minds are for ever restless as to their fears. It is a great thing to know what you tremble at, for when you know what you fear your fear is half gone. The indefinable shape, the mysterious hand which has no arm, but writes upon the wall in strange characters,—the cloudiness of all things dreaded makes the mind more restless. But blessed is the man to whom the Lord has taught his fear, so that he knows what he fears, and does not permit his hopes to be in perpetual eclipse.

Of this many-sided peace we must say something more. The Thessalonian church had been troubled three ways. They had been *persecuted from without*. That is not a pleasant thing, but the apostle says, "You that are troubled rest with us." Now, when the Lord Jesus Christ says to a persecuted saint, "I am with you: all the evil which is done unto you is done unto me, and you are bearing it for my name's sake,"

then, beloved, no persecution can break the peace of the soul, but rather the sufferer rejoices and is exceeding glad that he is counted worthy, not only to believe in Christ, but to suffer for his sake.

Next, the Thessalonian church was annoyed by certain *false teachers*. They did not absolutely teach novel doctrine, but upon a basis of truth they erected an edifice of error. They exaggerated one special truth, and carried its teaching to extravagance. They said, Christ is coming, therefore the day of the Lord is immediately at hand. They belonged to that order of fanatics who are always raving about "the signs of the times," and pretending to know what will happen within the next twenty years. There were impostors of that sort in Paul's day, and there are such impostors now. Believe them not, they can see no more of the future than blind horses. I put them all together as impostors, whether they are preachers or literary hacks, for no man knoweth the future, and no man can tell his fellow about it. I care no more for their explanations of prophecy than for the pretended winking of the eyes of the Madonna; yet will they continue the cheat, and will be saying, one this thing, and another that, that this and that wonder shall happen, and that terrible judgments shall overwhelm our nation. The apostle would not have the Thessalonians disturbed in their minds by fears about the future. Brethren in Christ, the most terrible fact of the future can be no just cause of alarm to a true believer. The Lord comforts his people, and there is nothing in his plans or purposes which is intended to disquiet them. You may rest assured that if any doctrine in the Bible prevents a godly man from enjoying peace it must be because he has not yet understood it fully, or else has mistaken its bearing towards himself. Truth must minister peace to true men. All truth, whether doctrinal or prophetic, is on the side of the children of God; how can it be otherwise? The apostle tells the Thessalonians not to be disturbed about the coming of Christ. "The Lord be with you all," saith he, and if the Lord be with us, what matters it to us whether he personally comes at once or chooses to delay? We should be looking for his coming, but not with alarm, for the fact that he has come already is a well-spring of delight. We glory in his first advent, and do not dread the second: since we are already raised up into the heavenly places to sit with him by faith, what matters it to us whether he is up there or down here, or whether we are in heaven or on earth, so long as we abide in him. There may arise, possibly there will arise, wild fanatics who will again spread alarming news about wars and rumours of wars, and select some fatal year as the end of all things. Well, if such things should be, if crowds should go into the wilderness or into the city to look for the coming of Christ, believe them not, but sit ye still in peace and tranquillity of spirit and say, "My soul loves him and he loves me. He cannot mean ill to me whether he destroys the earth or spares it. Though the heavens pass away and the earth itself melt with fervent heat, my heart is resting in her Lord and knows herself to be secure." Thus the Lord saves his people from the disturbance caused by false teaching.

There were also in the church disorderly characters, people that went about spreading idle tales and gossiping. They would not do anything for a living, and so they set people by the ears. But when the Lord

gives a Christian man deep spiritual peace within, he soon puts aside the small nuisances of idle tongues and disorderly deeds. He refuses to be worried. Mosquitoes buzz around every Christian church, and blessed is the man who does not feel their bite or heed their buzzing; his soul shall dwell at ease. Peace from church troublers is a great blessing, and we ought to praise God for it when we are in the enjoyment of it, for strife within the church, like civil war, is the worst of warfare. O to live in holy love and unbroken concord in reference to all our fellow Christians. May the Lord of peace grant us this.

Thus, you see, the peace which is here spoken of has many sides to it. May you possess it in all its forms, modes, and phases, and may your spirit enter into the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

II. Now, secondly, let us note THE SPECIAL DESIRABLENESS OF PEACE. It is a very great thing for a soul to realize perfect peace, for if it does not do so, it must miss the joy, and comfort, and blessedness of the Christian life. God never meant his children to be like thistle-down, wafted about with every breath, nor as a football, hurled to and fro by every foot. He meant us to be a happy, restful, established people. The cattle crop the grass, but they are not fattened till they lie down and ruminate in peace: the Lord makes his people to feed and to lie down in quietness. You do not know the gospel, dear friends, if you have not obtained peace through it; peace is the juice, the essence, the soul of the gospel. Doctrines are clusters, but you have never trodden them in the wine vat, you have never quaffed the flowing juice of their grapes if you have not peacefully considered divine truth in the quiet of your heart.

Without peace you cannot grow. A shepherd may find good pasture for his flock, but if his sheep are hunted about by wild dogs, so that they cannot rest, they will become mere skin and bone. The Lord's lambs cannot grow if they are worried and harried; they must enjoy the rest wherewith the Lord maketh the weary to rest. If your soul is always sighing, and moaning, and questioning its interest in Christ, if you are always in suspense as to what doctrine is true and what is false, if there is nothing established and settled about you, you will never come to the fulness of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus.

Neither without peace can you bear much fruit, if any. If a tree is frequently transplanted you cannot reasonably look for many golden apples upon its boughs. The man who has no root-hold, who neither believes, nor grasps, nor enjoys the gospel, can never know what it is to be steadfast, unmovable, neither will he be always abounding in the work of the Lord.

We know, too, some who, because they have no conscious peace with God, lack all stability, and are the prey of error. That doctrine can soon be driven out of a man's head which affords no light and comfort to his heart. If you derive no sweetness from what you believe, I should not marvel if you soon begin to doubt it. The power of the gospel is its best evidence to the soul; a man always believes in that which he enjoys. Only make a truth to be a man's spiritual food, let it be marrow and fatness to him, and I warrant you he will believe it. When truth becomes to a proud carnal mind what the manna became to murmuring Israel, namely, light bread that his soul abhorreth, then

the puffed up intellect cries after something more pleasing to the flesh; but to the mind which hungers and thirsts after righteousness the gospel is so soul-satisfying that it never wearies of it.

Brethren, you must have peace for your soul's wealth. What a difference there is between a soul at peace and a soul continually tossed about! I have seen one man's heart like a country whose hedges are broken down, whose walls are laid level with the ground, where irrigation is neglected, where tilling has ceased, where the vines are untrimmed, where the fields are unploughed, and all because there is a perpetual sound of war in the soul, and the song of peace is never heard. Such a soul may be likened to the Holy Land beneath Turkish rule, where no man has rest, and consequently the highways lie waste, and the gardens are a desert. But I have seen another man's life which has grown up under the influence of holy peace, from whom God has kept back the wandering Arabs of doubt and fear, and to whom he has given a settled government of grace and an establishment in steadfastness and quiet assurance, and, lo, that man has been as the land which floweth with milk and honey. As war spends and peace gathers the riches of nations, so does inward strife devour us, while spiritual peace makes the soul fat. Even as Palestine when it abounded in corn and wine and oil could nourish Tyre and Sidon, which border thereon, even so does the man who is rich towards God through internal peace become a feeder of other souls, till even they who are but borderers upon Immanuel's land obtain a blessing. Beloved, I would that every Christian knew this soul-enriching peace to the full. I am sorry to meet with so many who "hope" they are believers, and "trust" they are saved, but they are not sure. Ah, brethren, in these matters we must get beyond mere hopes, we must reach to certainties. "Ifs" and "buts" are terrible in the things which concern the soul and eternity. We must have plain and unquestionable security here, divine security applied to the soul itself by the Holy Ghost. Friend, you are either saved this morning or you are not saved; either you are in the love of God, or you are not; either you are secure of heaven, or you are not—one of the two. I beseech you, do not let these things be in jeopardy; chance anything rather than your soul. Cry mightily to God that you may have these things fixed, certain, positive, beyond all dispute, for then shall your soul enjoy peace with God, and so shall you become strong, useful, and happy.

III. Now, thirdly, we shall get into the very heart of our text while we consider for a minute or two **THE SOLE PERSON FROM WHOM THIS PEACE MUST COME**,—"Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace." Who is this "Lord of peace" but the Lord Jesus, the Prince of peace, born into the world when there was peace all over the world? It was but a little interval in which the gates of the temple of war were closed, and lo, Jesus came to Bethlehem, and angels sang, "Peace on earth." He came to establish an empire of peace which shall be universal, and under whose influence they shall hang the useless helmet high and study war no more. "The Prince of peace!" How blessed is the title! So was it written of old by Esaias, and Paul, the true successor of Isaiah, changing but a word, now speaks of "the Lord of peace." This is he who, being in himself essential peace, undertook to be the Father's

great Ambassador, and having made peace by the blood of his cross, ended the strife between man and his offended Maker. This is he who is our peace, who hath made Jew and Gentile one, and broken down the middle wall of partition which stood between us. This is the Lord who, when he stood in the midst of his disciples, gave them peace by saying, "Peace be unto you"; and this is he who in his departure made his last will and testament, and wrote therein this grand legacy—"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." This is that Lord of peace to whom it is part of his nature and office to give peace.

I want to call particular attention to the apostle's words in this place. He does not say "May the Lord of peace send his angel to give you peace." It were a great mercy if he did, and we might be as glad as Jacob was at Mahanaim, when the angels of God met him. He does not even say, "May the Lord of peace send his minister to give you peace." If he did we might be as happy as Abraham when Melchizedec refreshed him with bread and wine. He does not even say, "May the Lord of peace at the communion table, or in reading the word, or in prayer, or in some other sacred exercise give you peace." In all these we might well be as refreshed as Israel was at Elim where wells and palm trees gladdened the tribes; but he says "the Lord of peace *himself* give you peace," as if he alone in his own person could give peace, and as if his presence were the sole means of such a divine peace as he desires.

"The Lord of peace himself give you peace." The words are inexpressibly sweet to me. If you will think for a minute you will see that we never do obtain peace except from the Lord himself. What after all in your worst times will bring you peace? I will tell you. "This man shall be the peace." To me it has often afforded great peace to think of his mysterious person. He is a man tempted in all points like as I am, a man who knows every grief of the soul and every pain of the body, hence his tender sympathy and power to succour. Have you not often derived peace from that sweet reflection? You know you have. His person then is a source of peace. And have you not been rested in your soul by meditating upon his death? You have viewed him wounded, bleeding, dying on the tree; and, insensibly to yourself, a wondrous calm has stolen over your heart, and you have felt pacified concerning all things. Yes, Jesus is himself that bundle of myrrh and spice from which peace flows like a sweet perfume. When he comes very near your heart and lays bare his wounds, and speaks his love home to you, making you feel its divine fervency, when he assures you that you are one with him, united to him in an everlasting wedlock, which knows of no divorce—then it is that your soul is steeped in peace. This is an experimental business and no mere words can express it. "The Lord of peace himself give you peace,"—this, I say, he does mainly by manifesting himself to the heart of his servants.

Then notice that the text says, "*give* you peace," not merely offer it to you, or argue with you that you ought to have peace, or show you the grounds of peace, but "give you peace." He has the power to breathe peace into the heart, to create peace in the soul, and lull the spirit into that sweet sleep of the beloved which is the peculiar

gift of heaven. "I will give you rest," said he, and he can and will do it.

"*The Lord be with you all*": as much as to say, "That is what I mean." I pray that Jesus may be with you, for if he is present you must enjoy peace. Let the sea rage and let every timber of the ship be strained; yea, let her leak till between each timber there yawns a hungry mouth to swallow you up quick; yet when Jesus arises he will rebuke the winds and the waves, and there will be a great calm. "It is I, be not afraid," is enough to create peace at once. May you always know this peace which Jesus alone can give.

IV. Now I must conclude with the fourth head, which is a consideration of THE SWEEP OF THE PRAYER—"The Lord of peace himself give you peace *always*."

What! *always* at peace? Yea, that is what the apostle desires for you. May you have peace given you *always*. "Well, sir, I feel very happy on Sabbath-days. I have such peace that I wish I could have a week of Sundays." May the Lord himself give you peace *always*, on all the week days as well as on the Lord's days. "Truly, I have been very happy of late," says one, "God has prospered us and everyone has been very loving in the family; but I do not know how I should be if I had an awkward husband and unruly children." Sister, I will tell you what I want you to be,—I would have you restful under all circumstances,—*"The Lord of peace give you peace always."* "I enjoy such peace in the prayer-meeting," says one. I want you to have peace in the workshop also. "I do have peace when I get alone with my Bible," cries another. We pray that you may have equal peace when you are troubled with the ledger, and tired with those unpaid bills, and dull trade, and cross currents of business. You need peace *always*. Our friends who are commonly called Quakers have, as a rule, set us a fine example of calm, dignified quietness and peace. How undisturbed they generally appear. Whatever they fail in they certainly excel in a certain peacefulness of manner which I hope is the index of calm enjoyed within. Numbers of professors are very fretful, excitable, agitated, hasty, and fickle. It should not be so, brethren; you ought to have more weight about you, more grace, more solidity. Your soul's affairs are all right, are they not? All is right for ever, everything is signed, sealed, and delivered; the covenant is ordered in all things and sure, and everything is in divine hands for our good. Well, then, why not let us be as happy as the angels are? Why are we troubled? Is there anything worth shedding a tear for now that all is well for eternity? Our want of peace arises from the fact that we have not realized the fulness of our text. "The Lord of peace himself give you peace *always*." He can always give you peace, for he never changes; there is always the same reason for peace; you may always go to him for peace, and he is always ready to bestow it. Oh that we might always possess it!

Notice, again, it is written—"May the Lord of peace give you peace *always by all means*." Can he give us peace by all means? I know he can give us peace by some means, but can all means be made subservient to this end? Some agencies evidently work towards peace, but can he give us peace by opposing forces? Yes, certainly: he can give peace by the bitter as well as by the sweet, peace by the storm as well

as by the calm, peace by loss as well as by gain, peace by death as well as by life. For, notice there are two grand ways of giving us peace: and one is by taking away all that disquiets us. Here is a man who frets because he does not make money, or because he has lost much of his wealth. Suppose the Lord takes away from him all covetousness, all greed of gain, all love of the world—is he not at once filled with peace? He is at peace not because he has more money, but because he has less of grasping desire. Another man is very ambitious, he wants to be somebody, he must be great, and yet he never will be, and therefore he is restless. Suppose the grace of God should humble him and take away his lofty aspirations, so that he only wishes to be and to do what the Lord wills. Do you not see how readily he rests? Another man has an angry temper, and is soon put out: the Lord does not alter the people that are round about him, but he changes the man himself, makes him quiet, ready to forgive, and of a gentle spirit. What peace the man now feels! Another person has had an envious eye—he did not like to see others prosper, and if others were better off than himself he always thought hardly of them. The Lord wrings that bitter drop of envy out of his heart, and now see how peaceful he is—he is glad to see others advanced, and if he is tried himself it helps to make him happy to think that others are more favoured. It is a great blessing when the Lord removes the disturbing elements from the heart. Even curiosity may be a source of unrest. Many are a great deal worried by curiosity. I have sometimes wanted to know why the Lord does this and that with me. Blessed be his name, I am resolved not to question him any more in that fashion. Somebody prayed the other day that I might see the reason why the Lord has lately afflicted me. I hope the brother will not pray that any more, for I do not want to know the Lord's reasons—why should I? I know he has done right, and I will not dishonour him by catechising him and wanting him to explain himself to a poor worm. This is where the mischief has been with most of us, that we have wanted to see how this and that can be right. Why should we? If God conceals a thing let us be anxious to keep it concealed. A servant was passing through a street with a dish that was curiously covered. There met him a fellow who said, "I am most anxious to know what thy lord has put in that dish, for he has so carefully covered it." But the servant said, "Therefore shouldst thou not desire to know, for seeing my lord has so carefully covered it, it is clear that it is no business of thine." So whenever a providence puzzles you take it as a sign that the Lord does not mean you to understand it, and be content to take it upon faith. When curiosity and other restless things are gone peace is enjoyed.

Then the Lord has ways of giving us peace by making discoveries of himself. Some of you do not know as yet the things which would give you peace. For instance, if you did but know that he loved you from before the foundation of the world, and that whom once he loves he never leaves, you who are now afraid that you have fallen from grace would obtain strong consolation. Ay, and if you understood the grand doctrine of the divine decree, and saw that the Lord will not fail nor be discouraged, nor turn aside from one jot or tittle of his purpose, then you would see how you, poor insignificant believers though you be, are

one stitch in the great fabric that must not be suffered to drop, or ~~the~~ the whole fabric will be marred. You would understand how the eternal purpose ordered in wisdom, and backed up with sovereign power, guarantees your salvation as much as it does the glory of God, and so you would have peace.

Many a soul has not the peace it might have, because it does not fully understand the atoning blood. The great doctrine of substitution is not seen in all its length and breadth by some minds. But when they come to see Christ standing in the place of his chosen, made sin for them, and the chosen standing in Christ's place, "the righteousness of God in him," then will their peace be like a river. The grand truth of the union of the saints with Christ, if it be once understood, what a means of peace it is! He that believeth in Christ is one with him, a member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones, one with Christ by eternal and indissoluble union, even as the Father is one with the Son. If this be known, together with the doctrine of the covenant, the attribute of immutability, the eternal purpose, and the marriage union between Christ and his elect, deep peace must be enjoyed, like the calm of heaven, like the bliss of immortality.

But there are some to whom this peace cannot come, some concerning whom the Lord saith "What hast thou to do with peace?" "There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked." Your works, your prayers, your repentances, none of these can bring you peace. As for the world and the pleasures thereof, they are destructive to all hope of peace. Come ye this day and believe in the great sacrifice which God himself has prepared in the person of his crucified Son. Come look into Emanuel's face and read where peace is to be found. Come to the great gash in Jesus' side and see the cleft of the rock where God's elect abide in peace. Trust in Jesus and you shall begin a peace which shall widen and deepen into the peace of God which passeth all understanding, which shall keep your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Thess. ii. iii.

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A Sermon

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works."—Psalm cxix. 27.

WHEN we seek any good thing from God, we ought also to consider how we may use it for his glory. It is meet that desires for good things should flow from good motives. When the heart is not only gracious but grateful, it will turn to God with double purpose, desiring the mercy and desiring to use it to his praise. The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, doth marvellously whet the appetite for good things; it doth more, it provokes an intense anxiety to glorify God's name in the world, even before it has imparted the ability to do any good thing. Vehement passion and abject helplessness meeting together, and struggling in the breast, often lead to despondency, but they ought far rather to stimulate prayer.

Directly we are saved by grace we are eager after supplies for our soul's wants. "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*" This is the first stage of spiritual childhood; like the infant who cries for the bottle, and takes its little fill and feasts, all to itself, and all for itself. There follows on this another yearning, a desire for fellowship with the saints, although we feel too weak and too foolish to enter into such good company as we take the older disciples to be, or even to talk to them. But I will tell you what we can do. We may all venture to ask the Lord to instruct us and make us understand his ways, that so our conversation may be welcome to his people: and so he will. "*Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*" This is the second stage of development. Then comes a third grade; and come it surely will, if ye follow on to know the Lord. "*Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*" Speakest thou not, my brother, on this wise—"Thou hast told me, O my God, to covet earnestly the best gifts. I do covet them, Lord, thou knowest, not to

consume them upon my lusts, but to use them for thy service. I gladly will accept thy talents as a trust, not to trifle with them, not to want them as the toys of my vanity, but by thy grace as a wise and faithful steward to bring thee all the profit and all the interest, for I am greedy to get gain out of all those endowments thou dost entrust to my care." *"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works."*

I would have you further observe, on the threshold of our meditation, that there is not really any grave duty a man can be called on to discharge, no responsible office he may be elected to fill, nor even any plan or purpose he lays it on his heart to accomplish, which does not require diligent preparation on his own part to fit himself, to train his faculties, and to discipline his mind. What you call unskilled labour may possibly be utilized by efficient officers, but unskilful labour is a sheer waste of power. How much more imperative the demand that we should be endowed with the requisite faculties and qualified by suitable instruction if we have any work to do for God, or any office, however humble, in the service of the great King! Zeal without knowledge would only betray us into reckless presumption. When called to talk of God's wondrous works, we ought not to rush upon that exercise at once unfitted and unprepared, but we should wait upon the Lord, that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened, that our *stammering tongues* may be unloosed, and that our lips may be attuned to tell the noble tale in grateful strains. We must first obtain for ourselves an understanding of the way of the Lord's precepts before we can make it plain to others. He who tries to teach, but has never been taught himself, will make a sorry mess of it. He who has no understanding, and yet wants to make others understand, must assuredly fail. Some there are who cannot teach and will not learn, and it is because they will not learn that they cannot teach. I believe aptness for being taught is at the bottom of aptness to teach. The psalmist had both. He says, "Make me to understand the way of thy statutes." There he would be taught. "Then," saith he, "I shall talk of thy wondrous works." There he would be teaching.

In pondering the text, it has appeared to me to set forth three things, first, *the prayer of a student*; secondly, *the occupation of a scholar*; and thirdly, *the intimate relation there is between them*.

I. I see in it A STUDENT'S PRAYER. I hope, my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, that we are all students in the school of Christ—all disciples or scholars—and I trust we shall adopt the student's prayer as our own: "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts." You know that prayer is to study what fire is to the sacrifice; I beseech you, therefore, join heartily in the petition of the text.

The student's prayer deals with the main subject of the conversation which is to be that student's occupation, namely, the way of God's precepts. You and I, brethren, have to teach those things which relate to the counsels and commandments of the Lord. It is not our province to guide men in politics or to tutor them in science. Those things are better taught by men of mark, whose time and attention are absorbed in those profound and laborious researches. As for us who are Christians, and servants of Christ, our business is to teach men the things of God. To that one

opic we do well to keep, both for our own good and for the good of others. If we have many studies to engage us, our thoughts will soon be scattered; and if we multiply our pursuits, we shall be incapable of concentrating all our energies upon the grand topic which divine wisdom has selected for us—"the way of thy precepts."

In the way of God's legal precepts we have great need of sound understanding, that we may be competent to instruct others. It is well to be initiated in the law, to discern its wonderful comprehensiveness, spirituality, and severity; to know the way of the law—a way too hard to be trodden by any mortal man so as to win salvation thereby. It is well to survey the way of the Lord's precepts, to see how exceedingly broad and yet at the same time how remarkably narrow it is; for "thy commandment is exceeding broad," and yet "strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that go in hereat." It is well for us to know exactly what the law teaches, and what the law designs; why we were made subject to its prescript, and how we may be delivered from its penalties.

Great need too have we to understand the way of God's gospel precepts—what these precepts are: "repent," "believe," "be converted," and the like; to be able to see their relation, where they stand, not as means to an end, but as results of divine grace—commands not yet promises, the duty of man but yet the gift of God. Happy is that preacher and teacher who understands the way of the gospel precepts, and never lets them clash with the precepts of the law, so as to each a mangle-mangle, half law and half gospel, but who knows the way of God's legal precepts, and sees them all ablaze with divine wrath on account of sin, and discerns the way of the gospel precepts, and sees them all bright and yet all crimson with the precious blood of him that opened up for us the way of acceptance.

The way of God's precepts! Does not that mean that we ought to be acquainted with the relative position which the precepts occupy, for it is very easy, brethren, unless God gives us understanding, to preach up one precept to the neglect of another. It is possible for a ministry and a teaching to be lop-sided, and those who follow it may become rather the caricatures of Christianity than Christians harmoniously proportioned. O Lord, what foolish creatures we are! When thou dost exhort us one way, we run to such an extreme therein that we forget that thou hast given us any other counsel than that which is just now ringing in our ears. We have known some commanded to be humble, who have bowed down till they have become timorous and hesitating. We have known others exhorted to be confident, who have gone far beyond a modest courage, and grown so presumptuous that they have presently fallen into gross transgressions. Is fidelity to the truth thy cardinal virtue? Take heed of being uncharitable. Is love to God and man thy highest aspiration? Beware lest thou become the dupe of false apostles and foul hypocrites. Hast thou clad thyself with zeal as with a garment? Have a care now, lest by one act of indiscretion thy garment should be rolled in blood. Oh, how easy it is to exaggerate a virtue until it becomes a vice. A man may look to himself, examine himself, and scrutinize all his actions and motives till he becomes deplorably selfish; or on the other hand a man may look to others, coun-

selling them and cautioning them, preaching to them and praying for them, till he grows oblivious of his own estate, degenerates into hypocrisy, and discovers to his surprise that his own heart is not right with God. There is a "way" about the precepts: there is a chime about them in which every bell gives out its note and makes up a tune. There is a mixture, as of old, of the anointing oil,—so much of this and that and the other; and, if any ingredient were left out, the oil would have lost its perfect aroma. So is there an anointing of the holy life in which there is precept upon precept skilfully mingled, delicately infused, gratefully blended and grace given to keep each of these precepts, and so the life becomes sweet like an ointment most precious unto the Lord. God grant us each, if we are to teach others—and I hope we shall all try to do that—to understand the way of his precepts.

As a prayer, too, this must certainly mean, "Make me understand the way to keep thy precepts." It is not in human strength, for he that keeps the precepts of God must be kept by the God of the precepts. To keep the precepts we must keep him in the heart who gave the precepts, and whose life is the best exemplification of them. O Lord, teach us the way to observe and to do thy commands. Give us such humble, dependent hearts, so receptive of the sweet influences of thy Spirit, that we may understand the way in which those precepts are to be kept. Does it not signify,—“Lord, make me to understand the Christian life, for that is the way of thy precepts”? Dear friends, if you are teachers of others you must be experimentally acquainted with the Christian life: you must know the great doctrines which support it and furnish motives for it,—the great doctrines which are the pavement of the road along which the Christian travels. You must know the practical precepts themselves—what they are and how the Lord has worded them for each circumstance and each age of the Christian life. You must know the doctrinal and the practical; but you must know the experimental, and he is no preacher of any value who cannot tell the way of God's precepts by having experienced that way—having felt the joy of running in it—having taken the precepts and been guided by them, so as to have proved that “in keeping of them there is great reward.” Ay, and he will be none the worse teacher if he has a lively memory of the bitterness that comes of having wandered from those commandments, for he can tell the sinner, with the tear starting to his own eyes, that he who wanders from the way of obedience will miss the paths of peace, for the way of God's commandments is exceedingly pleasant, but they that break the hedge and follow their own will shall find that their wilfulness entails upon them grievous sorrow and sore pain. This is what we want—to understand the way of God's precepts. Let the prayer go up to heaven, especially from every young brother who is hoping to preach the word ere long, “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts.”

Very obviously here *a confession is implied*. “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts.” It means just this. “Lord, I do not understand it of myself. I am ignorant and foolish, and if I follow my own judgment,—if I take to my own thinkings, I shall be sure to go wrong. Lord, make me to understand.” It is a confession of a good man who did understand a great deal, but felt that he did not understand all. In

this learning, he who understands most is the man who thinks he understands least. He who has the clearest knowledge of divine things is the very one to feel that there is a boundless ocean far beyond his observation, and he cries "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts." It is a confession which should be made because it is intensely felt—the consciousness of folly and ignorance forcing the confession to the lip.

Our student's prayer asks a great boon when he says, "Make me to *understand*." This is something more than "Make me to *know*." He had said just before—"Teach me thy statutes." Every Christian needs this teaching for his own sake, but he that is to be an instructor of others must especially enquire for a thorough understanding. You Sunday-school teachers who take the oversight of the children, and you elders of the church who look after enquirers and help them to the Saviour, you must not be satisfied with knowing, you must *understand*. A superficial acquaintance with the Scriptures will not suffice for your important office. Your mind must penetrate into the deeper meaning, the hidden treasures of wisdom. "Make me to *understand*." A catechism may supply right answers; but we want the living teacher to give us true perceptions. Intelligence is not a faculty of babes; in understanding be ye men. Young pupils soon lose confidence in their preceptor if he does not seem up to the mark. I heard two schoolboys talking of their usher the other day. Says one, "I don't think he knows much more than we do." "Well, he always has to look at the book before he can tell us anything; has not he?" said the other little chap. Just now as I came along I watched two babies trying to carry another baby a little smaller than themselves, and they all three rolled down together. It is pretty to see little children anxious to help their little brother; but when the father comes up he lifts all three and carries them with ease. We have not many fathers, but every Christian man should aspire to that honourable and valuable estate in the church. The wisdom that comes of experience leads up to it. "Make me to understand." Oh Lord the children are pleased with the flowers, help me to spy out the roots: take me into the secrets, let me know the deep things of God. Help me to discriminate: enable me to judge and weigh and ponder, and so to understand. Such reasons as thou givest enable me to comprehend. Where thou givest no reason teach my reason to feel that there must be the best of reasons for no reasons having been given. So make me to understand what can be understood, and to understand that what I cannot understand is just as reliable as what I do understand. In understanding I can never find thee out, O God, to perfection. In thy sight I must still be a babe, though towards my fellow Christians I may be a man. "Make me to understand."

I love to meet with those of the Lord's people who have had their senses exercised in divine things, and their intelligence matured. For the most part we find disciples like babes, unskilful in the word of righteousness, using milk because unable to digest strong meat. Thank God for the babes, pray God they may soon grow and develop into men. He who knows that he is a sinner and that Christ Jesus is his Saviour, knows enough to save him. But we have no wish

to perpetuate childishness. The spelling-book is essential as a primer, but not the spelling book for ever! A B C must not be sung for ever in wearisome monotone; nor must "Only believe" become the everlasting song! Are there not other truths deeper and higher. There is the grand analogy of the faith: there is the doctrine of the covenant, there is the doctrine of election, there is the doctrine of the union of the saints with Jesus Christ. These are the deep things of God, and I think we should pray, "Make me, Lord, to understand them." Yet the best understanding is that which aims at personal holiness. "Make me to understand the *way of thy precepts*." Lord, if I cannot grapple with doctrine, do let me know which is the right way for me to take in my daily life. If sometimes thy truth staggers me, and I cannot see where this truth squares with that, yet Lord, grant that integrity and uprightness may preserve me. So make me to know and understand the way of thy statutes that, if I be tempted, and the Tempter come as an angel of light, I may so understand the difference between a true angel of light and the mock angel of light that I may not be taken in the snare. "Make me to understand the way of thy statutes." May my eye be keen to know the right in all its tangles. May I follow the silken clue of uprightness where it seems to wind and twist. Give thy servant such a clear understanding of what Israel ought to do, and of what he himself ought to do as a part of Israel, that he may never miss his way. This is the best kind of understanding in all the world.

The psalmist appeals to the Fountain of all wisdom, the source from whence all knowledge springs. Who can put wisdom in the inward parts but the Lord? Or who can give understanding to the heart but God Most High? Our parents and our Sunday-school teachers taught us the rudiments while we were supple and pliant with tender age. We thank them much, and we esteem them highly. Yet they could only teach the law and imprint, if possible, the letter of it on our memory, although even that we oft repeated and as oft forgot. It is the Lord that teacheth us to profit by the divine Spirit. How very wonderfully the Lord does teach us. Some lessons have to be whipped into us. Well, he does not spare the rod for our crying. Other lessons can only be burnt into us as with a hot iron. Some of us can bless the Lord that we bear in our body the prints of the Lord Jesus, that he branded his truth into our very flesh and bones, so that we cannot now miss it, but must understand it. Into what strange places God will put his children! You have heard of colleges called by odd names—Brasennose, and the like; but the most singular college I ever heard of was the whale's belly. Jonah would never have bowed his self-will to sovereign grace had he not been cast into the deep, compassed about with floods, and overwhelmed with billows and waves. But the soundness of his doctrine was very palpable in the voice of his thanksgiving, for as soon as ever he came out of the whale's belly, he said, "Salvation is of the Lord." A singular college for a prophet; but we may be content to leave the college to God, and if we be like Joseph sold into Egypt, or like the Hebrew children carried captive into Babylon, or wherever it may be—so long as he makes us to understand the way of his precepts we may be well content. Christ taught only three of his twelve apostles upon Tabor, but eleven of them in Gethsemane. Some

though favoured much with high joys, learn more by deep sorrows. He takes but three of them into the chamber where he raises the dead girl, for all his wonders are not to be seen by all his followers; but they may all behold him on the cross, and learn the sweet wonders of his dying love. I would not be satisfied, dear brethren and sisters, without trying to understand all that can be understood of the love of Jesus Christ, and of all those precious truths that make up the way of God's precepts. He is a poor scholar who does not wish to learn more than lies within the bare compass of his task: a good pupil will try to get as much as ever he can out of his teacher. Be it your resolve and mine always to be learning! Let us never be content lightly to skim the wave or gently sip the river's brim. Rather let us delight ourselves with diving into the clear stream of knowledge. Revelation invites research, and it unfolds its choice stores only to those who search for them as for hidden treasures. Oh, my God! I long to glean, to gather, to gain knowledge. I would fain yield up every hour I have to sit at thy feet. To thee I would surrender every faculty I have that I may be learning. By the ear, by the eye, by the taste would I imbibe instruction; yea, and in every season of recreation I would inhale the fragrance of thy wondrous works; and when I seek repose I would lean my head upon thy bosom, that I may learn thy love by the touch as well as by every other sense. May each gate of Mansoul be filled with the traffick of the precious merchandise of heavenly knowledge. And, Lord, I would open the inmost depth of my soul that thy light may shine into the most secret parts of my nature. Oh, hear my cry! Make me to understand the way of thy precepts!

II. Now, dear friends, let us pass on to notice, in the next place, THE OCCUPATION OF THE INSTRUCTED MAN. When the Lord has taught a man the way of his precepts, it behoves him rightly to use his sacred privileges: "So shall I talk of thy wondrous works."

As a faithful teacher let him testify of *God's works*—his wondrous works. It is a sorry sermon that is all about man's works, especially if the preacher makes out our good works to be something very remarkable. We are to preach, not man's works, but God's works—not our own works, but the works of our great Substitute. There are two works, especially, that you Christian people must talk about to others—the work of Christ *for* us and the work of the Holy Ghost *in* us. These are themes that will never be exhausted. The work of God the Son for us in his life and death, resurrection, and ascension, his intercession at the right hand of God, and his second advent—what a theme is before you here! How great are the works of Christ on our behalf! Preach his substitution emphatically. Let there be no mistake about that. Let it be told that Christ stood in the place and stead of his people, and lived and died for them. Moreover, there is the work of the Holy Spirit *in* us—the vital interest and importance of which it would not be possible to exaggerate. I should not like any man to try and talk about this divine ministry unless he has been brought under its power, and been led by experience to understand it—the work of conviction, the work of regeneration, the work of emptying, humbling and bringing down, the work of leading to repentance and to faith, the work of sanctification, the work of daily sustenance of the divine life, the work of perfecting the soul for heaven. There is plenty of room for blundering here if God

does not make you to understand the way of his precepts! But if you have a good clear knowledge of what Christian life is, then, my dear brothers and sisters, always be dwelling on these two things—what the Lord has done *for* us, and what the Lord is doing *in* us when he brings us out of darkness unto his marvellous light.

The wonderful character of these works of God opens up a study on which the devout mind can descant with ever awakening emotions of awe and delight. There are a few things in the world that men may wonder at. They used to speak of the seven wonders of the world. I believe that there is not one of those seven wonders which some have not ceased to wonder at. If you see them a sufficient number of times you get accustomed to them, and the wonder evaporates. But the works of the Lord, and these two works especially, you may think on them, meditate upon them, inspect them, enjoy them, every day of a long life; and the result will be, not a diminution, but an increase of your wonder. "Thy wondrous works!" God incarnate in the Son of Mary! Wondrous work, this! God in the carpenter's shop! The Son of God driving nails and handling a hammer! Wondrous work, this! Jesus at the loom, weaving a righteousness for his people, casting his soul into every throw of the shuttle, and producing such a matchless fabric for the wedding-dress of his own chosen bride that all the angels in heaven stand still and gaze at it, and marvel how such a fabric was wrought! Behold him—God himself in human flesh—dying, bearing human sin with a condescension that is wonderful beyond all wonder! Behold him casting all that sin into the depth of the sea, with wondrous might of merit, which drowned it in the bottomless abyss for aye! Wondrous work, that! Then see him going forth again, discharged from all his suretyship engagements, having paid the debt; and behold him nailing the handwriting of the ordinances that were against us to his cross. Oh, wondrous work! One might talk thereof by night and day, and never weary. View him rising as our representative, guaranteeing life to us; see him climbing the skies and casting a largesse of mercies amongst rebellious men. Consider the influence of his mediatorial authority, the power committed to him by his Father, for he hath power given him over all flesh, that he may give eternal life to as many as the Father gave him. List, list ye to his pleading as the Priest upon the throne. What wondrous work is that! Still through the apocalyptic vista gaze; gaze on all the glories of the future, when he shall come to reign upon the earth! There you have new fields of light breaking on your ravished view—fresh incentives to wonder, admire, and worship.

And what shall I say of these wondrous works which seem so near and so familiar to our observation, and yet baffle our investigation, till the more we scrutinize them the more amazement we feel? The church in the world kept alive from generation to generation by One whose presence was promised, was bestowed, and is now felt and proved by the saints, the blessed Paraclete, the Comforter whom Jesus sent from the Father. By his agency long seasons of drought and despondency have been ever and anon succeeded by times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, by revivals and renewals of signs and wonders such as began but did not end in the day of Pentecost. I never know which

to wonder at most,—God in human flesh, the incarnate Son, or the Holy Spirit dwelling in man. The indwelling is as wonderful as the incarnation. Let every gospel teacher yield up his own soul to the wonder and gratitude which these works of God are fitted to inspire. I like to see the preacher, when he is talking about these things, look like a man wonderstruck, gazing forth on a vast expanse, lost in immensity, as if he were far out at sea, trembling with adoration, as if the chords of his nature vibrated to the mystery and awe that encircle him. There are lovely traces of God's transcendent skill in things minute when peered at through a microscope; but these wondrous works of God are of another order. They display his grander power. Tell not the old, old story as if it had grown trite and trifling in your ears, and tripped from off your tongue. List to the slow deep mellow voice of the mighty ocean of grace until thy soul faints within thee. Then speak in tones of strong emotion like those of Paul—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!"

Yet it becomes you to *speake very plainly*. See how it is put. "I will *talk* of thy wondrous works." Talk is the simplest mode of speech. You cannot all preach, but you can all talk; and, if some preachers would refrain from rhetoric and tell their plain unvarnished tale, they would succeed better than they do now. Do you think that God meant his ministers to kill themselves in order come out on Sundays with one or two splendid displays of "intellect" and eloquence? Surely this is not God's way of doing things. I do not believe that Paul ever preached a fine sermon, or that Peter ever dreamed of any display of intellect. I asked the other day of one who had heard a sermon if it was likely that sinners would be converted by it. He said, "Oh no; by no means; but it was an intellectual treat." Is there anywhere in the Bible a word about intellectual treats, or anything approximating to such an idea? Is there not a country on the other side of the sea, where they are attempting fine flashy oratory—sermons that remind you of the way in which they finish up the fireworks; discourses made made up of blue lights and blazes? They call it a "peroration," I believe. But the way for the Christian—the real Christian—is to *talk* of God's wondrous works. Tell me the old, old story. Tell it not stately, but do tell it simply, as to a little child. More glory will come to God from that, more comfort to your soul in reflection, and more benefit to the souls of those you teach, than from all the flights of poetry or the flourishes of rounded periods. They that would win souls must take David's words here, and say, "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts," so shall I give up all the "spread eagle," and "I shall talk of thy wondrous works." "Blessed be God," said a farmer at a prayer-meeting, "that we were fed last Sunday out of a low crib, for we have mostly had the fodder so high that we poor things could not reach it." When I read that farmer's thanksgiving, I thought it very wise.

When a man is instructed in the faith he will often speak about these things. Such conversation may be frequent without being irksome: he says, "I will *talk*." Preaching is an exercise to be undertaken now and then, but talking, I believe, is capable of being carried

on by some people very nearly every minute of the day. Certainly few persons account it a hardship to talk every day; and when God makes us to understand the way of his precepts we shall have the gospel at our fingers' ends, so that whoever we meet with, we shall be able to talk to them in an earnest and simple style about God's salvation. I would, dear friends, that our talk were always seasoned with salt,—that our commonest conversation were bedewed with heavenly unction, ministering grace unto the hearers.

But though very plain and very frequent, the good psalmist's talk was very much to the point, and it did not lack propriety; for he says, "So shall I talk of thy wondrous works." How does he mean? Why, according to understanding. "Make me to understand, and then I shall talk like an intelligent man." May you, dear brethren and sisters, who do talk about Jesus Christ be enabled to talk about him in a wise way. Very serious mischief has often come from harping upon some one string. Some men are far more interested in stating their own crotchets than in unfolding God's counsels. If we understand the way of God's precepts, acquire the language of it, get into the groove of it, then we shall talk with understanding; and there will be a harmony and a wisdom about our utterances which will be blest to the edification of the hearers.

III. We will close by noticing THE INTIMATE RELATION BETWEEN THE PRAYER OF THE STUDENT AND THE PURSUIT THAT HE SUBSEQUENTLY FOLLOWED. "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works."

The connection lies partly in the enchantment of this knowledge and the passion to communicate it. A man who understands Christ and his mediatorial work, and the Spirit and his sanctifying work cannot be silent. The fire once kindled the flames will spread. He will be so transported with wonder, admiration, and adoring gratitude at the great mercy and love of God, that it will cause a fermentation within his breast. He will be like a full vessel wanting vent, and he must have it. As with a fire in his bones, he will exclaim, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." I would to God there were a deeper understanding of the ways of God, for then many silent tongues must speak. The theme itself without any remarkable gifts on the part of the man would suffice to secure the attention it strongly claims. As the heart swells with thankfulness, the lips burst forth spontaneously into song. Doubtless Hannah would tell you that it was easier for a barren wife to restrain her tears than for a joyful mother to stifle her hymn of praise. Did Jesus love you when you were all forlorn? Did he find you when a stranger, and prove himself your friend? Did he shelter you when a sinner, and shield you from all harm? Did he die that you might live? Dost thou know that Jesus is thy near kinsman, and that he takes great delight in redeeming thee for himself? Let the truth of this but dawn on thy heart, and though thy tongue were dumb before it must now begin to talk.

"Now will I tell to sinners round,
What a dear Saviour I have found,
I'll point to thy redeeming blood
And say, 'Behold the way to God.'"

May this stir up some of you who love the Lord, and yet never talk about him; may it lead you to a holy searching of heart. Surely you have not such an understanding of him as you ought to have, or else sometimes your silence would be thawed, and your words would betray your strong emotions.

If I understand the way of God's precepts, then I shall be fully furnished with matter to talk of his wondrous works. What a dreadful thing it must be for a man to set up to be a teacher of others if he does not know the things of God experimentally himself. It can be done, you know, and done very cheaply. You can buy sermons ready lithographed and guaranteed not to have been preached within so many miles: price ninepence each. You can be furnished with them for ten shillings and sixpence a quarter. But there will be a heavy account at the last for the man who does that sort of thing. It is easy for you to teach in your class by reading the Sunday School Union notes, getting up the lesson, and having it all in the head. Ah, but, my dear friend, how will you answer for having taught children in the Sunday-school when you have never been God's child and never have been taught of God yourself? "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or to take my name into thy mouth?" Do not try to teach others what you do not understand yourself. Go down on your knees and cry, "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts, so shall I talk of thy wondrous works." Dear brethren, especially you who are to be ministers of the gospel and have begun to preach, seek a deeper understanding of divine things, or else your ministry will be lean and poverty-stricken. Unless you are taken into the confidence of God and initiated into his counsels you cannot possibly discharge the solemn duties which lie upon the ambassador for Christ. Cry mightily to be well filled with an understanding of the gospel: so shall you overflow to others and talk of God's wondrous works.

Such sound education will clothe you with authority. A man who, in his own heart, knows what he is talking about, and preaches what he has tasted and handled of the good word of grace, will put weight into every utterance. It matters but little what language he uses, the power lies not in the garnishing, but in the truth itself which he proclaims. It is not the polish of his speech but the fervour of his soul which gives force to his persuasions. Oh, how often my heart has been refreshed by a humble testimony from a poor man who has talked only about what the Lord has done for him. What a power there is about experimental talk. Dry doctrine and pious platitudes borrowed from books, fall flat on the ear and pall on the taste, but he who talks of the things which he has made touching the King, has a tongue like the pen of a ready writer. I know aged Christians who seem, every time they speak, to drop diamonds and emeralds from their lips; one could wish to treasure up every syllable they utter, not because there is anything very ingenious or original in any sentence, but because there is a sound of abundance of rain in every word; a divine depth, a sacred sweetness, a leaping of life, even in each broken utterance which is born on their lips. You say, "That man knows more than he tells. He does not expose all his wares in the window. He has been in the secret place of communion. His face shines though his voice falters." Such

teachers may you and I prove in our riper years, having light in ourselves and illuminating all who are within the range of our influence. What God has led us to understand, may we be the means of communicating by our ordinary conversation, by speech easy, simple, unostentatious, yet earnest, faithful, and heavenly minded.

Brethren, be up and doing, teaching others what you know. Do not try to teach them what you do not know. As far as you know Christ, speak about him to your kinsfolk and acquaintance, your friends and neighbours. Our dear brother and elder, the late Mr. Verdon, on such a night as this would have been anxiously looking after any person who seemed to have heard with thankfulness, and he would not have suffered them to leave the place without accosting them in his own gentle manner, and beginning to talk to them about Christ. I want some more like him. He has gone home. I pray the Lord that some may be baptized for the dead, to stand in his place and fill up the gap which his removal has made in our ranks. We want a host of wise and prudent Christian talkers. I do not know that we have at present any more urgent need: people who can talk in the train, can talk by the roadside, can talk in the kitchen, can talk in the workshop, can talk across a counter, can, in fact, make opportunities to talk of Jesus. I want you, dear friends, to ask the Lord to qualify you for this service and lead you into it. Some of you appear to be marching backward, for you are even more reticent than you used to be. I would have you like Archimedes when he found out his secret and could not keep it for very joy, but ran down the street crying out, "I have found it! I have found it!" Come, break your guilty silence and cry aloud, "I have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write, and I cannot help talking about him."

As for others of you who are not believers, I pray the Lord that you may give a listening ear to the message which I ask others to tell out. Here it is: "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Whosoever believeth in him hath everlasting life." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The Lord bring you to accept these tidings, to believe in Jesus, and to find eternal life. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix. 17—32.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—33, 119.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FOR WHOM IS THE GOSPEL MEANT?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING MARCH 25TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."—Mark ii. 17.

"Christ died for the ungodly."—Romans v. 6.

"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—Romans v. 8.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."—1 Timothy i. 15.

LAST Thursday evening, with considerable difficulty, I stood here to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I handled one of the simplest imaginable texts, full of nothing but the very plainest elements of the gospel. Within a very few minutes I had a harvest for the sermon. The congregation was slender, for you know how ill a night it was, and how little you expected that your pastor would be able to preach, but three souls came forward uninvited to acknowledge that they had found peace with God. How many more there were I do not know, but these three sought out the brethren, and bore a good and hearty confession to the blessed fact that for the first time in their lives they had understood the plan of salvation. Now, it seemed to me that if a plain gospel theme was so promptly profitable, I had better keep to the like subjects. If a farmer finds that a certain seed has paid him so well that he never had a better crop before, then he will keep to that seed, and sow more of it. Those processes of husbandry which have been successful should be persevered in, and even used upon a larger scale. So this morning I shall just preach the A B C of the gospel, the first rudiments of the art of salvation, and I thank God this will be no new thing to me. May God the Holy Spirit, in answer to your prayers, grant us a reward this morning after the same proportion as last Thursday, and, if so, our heart will be exceeding glad.

Out of a very great number I have selected the four texts which I have read just to set forth the truth that the mission of our Lord related to sinners. What did Christ come into the world for? For whom did he come? These are questions of the greatest importance, and they are

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clearly answered in Scripture. When the children of Israel first found manna outside the camp they said to one another, "Manna?" or, what is it? for they wist not what it was. There it lay, a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost upon the ground. No doubt they looked at it and rubbed it in their hands, and smelt it, but how glad they were when Moses said, "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat." They were not long before they put the good news to the test, for each man gathered his omer full and took it home, and prepared it according to his liking. Now, concerning the gospel, there are many who might call out "Manna?" for they know not what it is. Very frequently, too they make a mistake as to its bearings and its objects, dreaming that it is a kind of improved law, or an easier system of salvation by works; and hence they err also in their idea of the persons for whom it is designed. They imagine that surely the blessings of salvation must be meant for deserving persons, and Christ must be the Redeemer of the meritorious. On the principle of "good for the good" they infer that grace is for the excellent and Christ for the virtuous. Hence it is a most useful thing for us continually to be reminding men what the gospel is, and for whom it is sent into the world; for, though the great mass of you know full well, and do not need to be told, yet there are multitudes around us who persist in grave mistakes, and need to be instructed over and over again in the very simplest of the doctrines of grace. There is less need for laborious explanations of profound mysteries than for simple explanations of plain truths. Many men need only a simple latchkey to lift the latch and open the door of faith, and such a key I hope God's infinite mercy may put into their hands this morning. Our business is to show that the gospel is intended for sinners, that it has an eye to guilty persons; that it is not sent into the world as a reward for the good and for the excellent, or for those who think they have any measure of fitness or preparation for the divine favour; but that it is intended for law breakers, for the undeserving, for the ungodly, for those who have gone astray like lost sheep, or left their father's house like the prodigal. Christ died to save sinners, and he justifieth the ungodly. The truth is plain enough in the Word, but since the human heart kicks against it we will the more earnestly insist upon it.

First, EVEN A SUPERFICIAL GLANCE AT OUR LORD'S MISSION SUFFICES TO SHOW THAT HIS WORK WAS FOR THE SINFUL. For, dear brethren, the *descent of the Son of God into this world as a Saviour* implied that men needed to be delivered from a great evil by a divine hand. The coming of a Saviour who should by his death provide pardon for human sin supposed men to be greatly guilty, and to be incapable of procuring pardon by any doings of their own. You would never have seen a Saviour if there had not been a fall. Eden's withering was a necessary preface to Gethsemane's groaning. You would never have heard of a cross and a bleeding Saviour on it if you had not first heard of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and of a disobedient hand which plucked the forbidden fruit. If the mission of our Lord did not refer to the guilty it was an unnecessary errand altogether, so far as we can see. What justifies the incarnation except man's ruin? What explains our Lord's suffering life but man's guilt? Above all, what explains his death and the cloud under which he died but human sin? "All we like

sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"—that is the answer to an otherwise unanswerable riddle.

If we give a glance at *the covenant under which our Lord came* we soon perceive that its bearing is towards guilty men. The blessing of the covenant of works has to do with men who are innocent, and to them it promises great blessings. If there had been salvation by works it would have been by the law, for the law is upright and just and good; but the new covenant evidently deals with sinners, for it does not speak of the reward of merit, but it freely promises, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." If there had been no sins and iniquities, and no unrighteousness, then there had been no need of the covenant of grace, of which Christ is the messenger and the ambassador. The slightest glimpse at our Lord's official character as the Adam of a new covenant should suffice to convince us that his errand is to guilty men. Moses comes to show how the holy should behave, but Jesus comes to reveal how the unholy may be cleansed.

Whenever we hear the mission of Christ spoken of it is described as one of *mercy and of grace*. In the redemption which is in Christ Jesus it is always the mercy of God that is extolled—according to his mercy he saved us. He for Christ's sake, according to his abundant mercy, forgiveth us our trespasses. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ." "The grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." The apostle Paul, who most fully expoundeth the gospel, makes grace to be the one word upon which he rings the changes: "where sin abounded grace did much more abound." "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." But, brethren, mercy implies sinfulness: there can be no mercy extended to the just, for justice itself secures every good thing to them. Grace, too, can only be for offenders. What grace is wanted by those who have kept the law, and deserved well at Jehovah's hands? To them eternal life would be a matter of debt, a fairly earned reward; but when you talk of grace you at once shut out merit and introduce another principle. Mercy can only be exercised where there is sin, and grace cannot be manifested except to the undeserving. This is plain enough, and yet the whole tenor of some men's religion is based on another theory.

The fact is, when we begin to study the gospel of the grace of God we see that it *turns its face always towards sin*, even as a physician looks towards disease, or as charity looks towards distress. The gospel issues its *invitations*; but what are the invitations? Are they not addressed to those who are burdened with a load of sin, and labouring to escape from its consequences? It invites every creature because every creature has its needs, but it specially says "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts." It invites the man who has no money, or, in other words, no merit. It calls to those who are needy, and thirsty, and poor, and naked, and all these are but used as figures of-states produced by sin. The very *gifts* of the gospel imply sin; life is for the dead, sight is for the blind, liberty is for the captives,

cleansing is for the filthy, absolution is for the sinful. No gospel blessing is proposed as a reward, and no invitation is issued to those who claim the blessings of grace as a matter of right; men are invited to come and receive them freely according to the grace of God. And what are the *commands* of the gospel? Repent. But who repenteth save a sinner? Believe. But believing is not according to the law; the law speaks only of doing. Believing has to do with sinners, and with the method of salvation by grace.

The gospel representations of itself usually look sinnerward. The great king who makes a feast finds not a guest to sit at the table among those who were naturally expected to come, but from the highways and hedges men are compelled to come in. If the gospel describes itself as a feast it is a great feast for the blind, the halt, and the lame; if it describes itself as a fountain it is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Everywhere, in all that it does and says and provides to men, the gospel proves itself to be the sinner's friend. The motto of its Founder and Lord still is "this man receiveth sinners." The gospel is an hospital for the sick, none but the guilty will ever accept its benefits; it is medicine for the diseased, the whole and the self-righteous will never relish its saving draughts. Those who imagine that they have some excellence before God will never care to be saved by sovereign grace. The gospel, I say, looks sinnerward. That way and that way only doth it cast its blessings.

And brethren, ye know that the gospel has *always found its greatest trophies amongst the most sinful*: it enlists its best soldiers not only from amongst the guilty but from amongst the most guilty. "Simon," said our Lord, "I have somewhat to say unto thee—A certain man had two debtors, the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty, and when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" The gospel goes upon the principle that he who has had much forgiven the same loveth much, and so its gracious Lord delights to seek out the most guilty and to manifest himself to them with abundant and overflowing love, saying "I have blotted out thy sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thy transgressions." Among great transgressors it finds its warmest lovers when once it has saved them, from these it receives the heartiest welcome and in them it obtains the most enthusiastic adherents. Great sinners when saved crown free grace with its most illustrious diadems. Well may we be sure that it has its eye towards sinners, since it is amongst the chief of sinners that it finds its highest glory.

There is one other reflection which also lies very near the surface, namely, that if the gospel do not look towards sinners, *to whom else could it look?* There seems to have been a revival lately of the old cavilling spirit, so that proud Pharisees constantly tell us that the preaching of justification by faith is overdone, and that we are leading people to think less of morality by preaching up the grace of God. This oft refuted objection is coming forth again, because Protestantism is losing its sap and soul. The very force and backbone of the Reformers' teaching was that great doctrine of grace, that salvation is not of works but of the grace of God alone; and because men are getting away from the Reformation, and drifting into Romanism, they are casting into the background

a grand truth of justification by faith alone, and pretending to be aid of it. But O, knaves and fools that most men are upon this matter! ~~not~~ to all such this one question—To whom, sirs, would the gospel ~~be~~ if not towards sinners, for what are you but sinners? You who ~~ask~~ about morality being injured, about holiness being ignored, what ~~do~~ you to do with either? The people who usually urge these objections, as a rule, had better be quiet on such topics. In general these ~~are~~ defenders of morality and holiness are exceedingly lax, while ~~believers~~ in the grace of God are frequently charged with Puritanism and rigidity. He who stands out most to speak against the doctrines of ~~grace~~ is frequently the man who needs grace most, while the very man who cries down good works as a ground of trust is just the person whose ~~life~~ is carefully directed by the statutes of the Lord. Know ye, O men, that there lives not on the face of the earth a man upon whom God can look with pleasure if he consider that man on the ground of his law. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one,"—not one heart is ~~right~~ and right before God by nature, not one life is pure and clean when the Lord comes to examine it with his all-searching eye. We ~~are~~ shut up in the same prison as all guilty: if not alike guilty, yet ~~equally~~ according to the proportion of our light and knowledge, and each ~~is~~ justly condemned, for we have erred in heart and have not loved the Lord. To whom, then, could the gospel look if it did not cast its ~~eyes~~ sinnerward? For whom else could the Saviour have died? Who is ~~there~~ in the world for whom the benefits of grace could be designed?

II. Secondly, THE MORE CLOSELY WE LOOK THE MORE CLEAR THIS ~~IT~~ BECOMES, for, brethren, *the work of salvation was certainly not performed for any one of us who are saved on account of any goodness in us.* there be any goodness in us, it was put there by the grace of God, and certainly was not there when first the bowels of Jehovah's love began move towards us. If you take the first ensign of salvation that was ~~usually~~ visible on earth, namely, the coming of Christ, we are told concerning it that "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." So that our redemption, my brother, was effected ~~before~~ we were born. This was the fruit of the Father's great love ~~herewith~~ he loved us, even when we were dead in sins." There was ~~nothing~~ in us going before which could have merited that redemption, ~~and~~ the very idea of meriting the death of Jesus is absurd and blasphemous. Yes, and when we were living in sin and loving it, there ~~are~~ preparations made for our salvation; divine love was busy on our ~~half~~ when we were busy in rebellion. The gospel was brought near ~~us~~, earnest hearts were set a-praying for us, the text was written which would convert us; and as I have already said, the blood was ~~it~~ which cleanses us, and the Spirit of God was given, who should ~~show~~ us. All this was done while as yet we had no breathings of soul ~~or~~ God. Is not that a wonderful passage in Ezekiel, where the Lord ~~sed~~ by and saw the helpless infant cast out in the open field while it ~~is~~ yet unswaddled and unwashed, but was foul and polluted in its own

blood? He says that it was a time of love, and yet it was a time of pollution and loathing. He did not love the chosen babe because it was well washed and fitly clad, but he loved it when it was foul and naked. Let every believing heart admire the freeness and compassion of divine love.

"He saw me ruin'd in the fall,
Yet loved me, notwithstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate,
His loving-kindness, oh, how great!"

When thy heart was hard, when thy neck was obstinate, when thou wouldst not repent nor yield to him but rebelled yet more and more, he loved thee, even thee, with supreme affection. Why such grace? Why indeed, but because his nature is full of goodness and he delighteth in mercy. Is not mercy seen to be evidently extended towards the sinful and not exerted because of some goodness moving thereto?

Look a little closer still. *What did our Lord come into the world to do?* Here is the answer. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." He came that he might be a sin-bearer: and do you think he came to bear only the little, trifling sins of the best sort of men, if such sins there be? Do you suppose that he is a little Saviour, who came to save us from little offences? Beloved, it is Jehovah's darling Son that comes to earth and bears the load of sin, a load which, when he bears it, he finds to be no fictitious burden, for it forces from him the bloody sweat. So heavy is that load that he bows his head to the grave, and even unto death, beneath it. That stupendous load which lay on Christ was the heap of our sins; and hence as we look into the subject we perceive that the gospel must have to do with sinners. No sin! Then is the cross a mistake. No sin! Then the *lama sabachhani* was a just complaint against unnecessary cruelty. No sin! Then, O Redeemer, what are those glories which we have so eagerly ascribed to thee? How canst thou put away sin which does not exist? The existence of great sin is implied in the coming of Christ, and that coming was occasioned and rendered necessary by sin, against which Jesus comes as our Deliverer. He declares that he has opened a fountain, filled with the blood of his own veins. But what for? A cleansing fountain implies filth. It must be, sinner, that somewhere or other there are filthy people, or else there had not been such an amazing fountain as this, filled from the heart of Christ. If thou be guilty thou art one who needs the fountain, and it is opened for thee. Come thou with all thy sin and foulness about thee and wash this morning, and be clean.

"'Twas for sinners that he suffer'd
Agonies unspeakable;
Canst thou doubt thou art a sinner?
If thou canst—then hope farewell.

"But, believing what is written—
'All are guilty'—'dead in sin,'
Looking to the Crucified One
Hope shall rise thy soul within."

Brethren, all *the gifts which Jesus Christ* came to give, or at least most of them, imply that there is sin. What is his first gift but pardon? How can he pardon a man who has not transgressed? With all reverence do I speak, there can be no such thing as pardon where there is no offence committed. Propitiation for sin and blotting out of iniquity both require that there must be sin to be blotted out, or what is there real about them? Christ comes to bring justification, and this shows that there must be a lack of natural holiness in men, for if not they would be justified by themselves and by their own works. And why all this outcry about justification by the righteousness of the Son of God if men are already justified by a righteousness of their own? Those two blessings, and others of the same kind, are clearly applicable only to sinful men. To no other men can they be of any use.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came *girded also with divine power*. He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." To what end was he girded with divine power unless it be because sin had taken all power and strength from man, and man was in a condition out of which he could not be lifted except by the energy of the eternal Spirit? And what does this imply but that Christ's errand bears upon those who through sin are without strength and without merit before God? The Holy Spirit is given because man's spirit has failed: because sin has taken the life out of man, and made him dead in trespasses and sins, therefore comes the Holy Spirit to quicken him into newness of life, and that Spirit comes by Jesus Christ. Therefore the errand of Jesus Christ is manifestly to the guilty.

I will not omit to say that *the great deeds of our Lord*, if you look at them carefully, all bear upon sinners. Jesus lives; it is that he may seek and save that which is lost. Jesus dies; it is that he may make a propitiation for the sins of guilty men. Jesus rises; he rises again for our justification, and as I have shown, we should not want justification unless we had been naturally guilty. Jesus ascends on high, and he receives gifts for men; but note that special word, "Yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell among them." Jesus lives in heaven, but he lives there to intercede. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." So take whatever part of his glorious achievements you please you will find that there is a distinct bearing towards those who are immersed in guilt.

And, beloved, *all the gifts and blessings that Jesus Christ has brought to us derive much of their radiance from their bearing upon sinners*. It is in Christ Jesus that we are elect, and to my mind the glory of electing love lies in this, that it pitched upon such undeserving objects. How had there been any election had it been according to merit? Then men would have taken rank by right according to their own deeds, but election's glories are brilliant with grace, and grace always has for its foil and background the unworthiness of the objects towards whom it is manifested. The election of God is not according to our works, but it is a gracious election of sinners. Adore and wonder.

Turn you to effectual calling, and see how delightful it is to view that calling as a calling from among the dead, as a calling of the things that are not as though they were, as a calling of condemned ones into

forgiveness and favour. Turn ye next to adoption. What is the glory of adoption, but that God has adopted those who were strangers and rebels to make them his children? What is the peculiar beauty of regeneration, but that he has been able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham? What is the beauty of sanctification, but that he has taken such unholy creatures as we are to make us kings and priests unto God, and to sanctify us wholly—spirit, soul, and body? To my mind it is the glory of heaven to think that yonder white-robed choristers were once foully defiled; those happy worshippers were once rebels against God. It is a happy sight to see the unfallen angels who have kept their first estate, perfectly pure and for ever praising God; but the vision of fallen men divinely restored is more full of the glory of God. Lift as they may their joyful voices in perpetual chorales the angels can never reach the special sweetness of that song—"We have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They cannot experimentally enter into that truth which is of Jehovah's name its crowning glory—"Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

Thus I have abundantly shown that the further we look the more clear it is that the gospel is aimed at sinners and especially intended for their benefit.

III. Now, thirdly, it is evident that IT IS OUR WISDOM TO ACCEPT THE SITUATION. I know that to many this is very unpalatable doctrine. Well, friend, you had better have your palate altered, for you will never be able to alter the doctrine. It is the truth of the everlasting God, and cannot be changed. The very best thing you can do, since the gospel looks towards sinners, is to get where the gospel looks; and I can recommend this to you, not merely on the ground of policy, but on the ground of honesty, because *you will be only in your right place when you get there.* I think I hear you raising objections. "I do not admire this system. Am I to be saved in the same way as the dying thief?" Precisely so, sir, unless there should happen to be even more grace shown towards you than to him. "But you do not mean to assert that in the matter of salvation I am to be put on a level with the woman that was a sinner? I have been pure and chaste, and am I to owe my salvation just as much to the absolute mercy of God as she did?" Yes, sir, I do say that, exactly as it stands. There is but one principle upon which the Lord saves men, and it is that of pure grace. I want you to understand this. Even if it grinds like grit between your teeth, and makes you angry; I shall not regret it so long as you know what I mean; for the truth may yet find entrance into your soul, and you may yet bow before its power. Oh, you children of godly parents, you young people of excellent morals and delicate consciences, to you I speak, even to you. Rejoice in your privileges, but do not boast in them, for you too have sinned, you have sinned against light and knowledge, you know you have. If you have not plunged into the grosser sins in act and deed, yet in desire and in imagination you have gone far enough astray, and in many things you have offended grievously against God. If, with these considerations before you, you take your place as a sinner you will not be disgraced, but be merely standing where you certainly are.

And then remember, if you get the blessing this way, you will have

obtained it in *the safest possible way*. Suppose there are a number of guest chambers, and I have my seat in one of the best of them, I may have no right to be there. I am eating and drinking of what is provided for superior guests, but my ticket does not mark me out as one of these, and therefore I am ill at ease. Every mouthful that I eat I think to myself, "I do not know whether I shall be allowed to remain here, perhaps the Lord of the feast will come in and say to me, 'Friend how camest thou in hither?' and I must begin with shame to take the lowest room." Brethren, when we begin at the bottom, and sit in the lowest room we feel safe, we are satisfied that what we do get is meant for us, and will not be taken away from us. Perhaps, also, when the king comes he may take us up to a higher room. There is nothing like beginning in the lowliest place. When I lay hold of the promise as a saint I have my doubts about it, but when I grasp it as a sinner I can have no question. If the Lord bid me feed on his mercy as his child I do it, but the devil whispers that I am presuming; for I never was really adopted by grace; but when I come to Jesus as a guilty, undeserving sinner, and take what the Lord freely presents to me upon believing, the devil himself cannot tell me that I am not a sinner, or if he does the lie is too transparent, and causes me no distress. There is nothing like having an indefeasible title, and if the description given to you in the title is that you are a sinner, it is an indisputable one, for depend upon it a sinner you are. So the sinner's place is your true place and your safest place.

Another blessing is, it is *a place into which you can get directly*, even at this very moment. If the gospel looks towards men in a certain state of heart in which there are commendable virtues, then how long will it take me to raise my heart to that state? If Jesus Christ comes into the world to save men who have a certain measure of excellence, then how long will it take me to obtain that excellence? I may be taken sick and die within half-an-hour, and hear the sentence of eternal judgment, and it would be poor gospel to tell me that I might possibly obtain salvation if I attained a state which would take me several months to reach. At this hour I, a dying man, do know that I may be gone out of this world and beyond the reach of mercy within an hour; what a comfort it is that the gospel comes to me and gives itself to me just now, even as it finds me! I am already in that position in which grace begins with men, for I am a sinner, and I have only to own that I am so. Now then, poor soul, just sit thee down before the Lord and say, "Lord, does thy Son come to save the guilty? I am such, and I trust him to save me. Did he die for the ungodly? I am such, Lord, I trust in his blood to cleanse me. Was his death for sinners? Lord, I take up the position. I plead guilty. I accept the sentence of thy law as being just, but save me, Lord, for Jesus died." It is done; you are saved. Go in peace, my son; thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee. Go, my daughter, go thy way, and rejoice: the Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die, for he that believeth is justified from all sin. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. Get, then, into your true position, accept the situation in which grace considers you to be. Do not talk of justice and merit; but appeal to pity and

love. A certain man had several times plotted against the first Napoleon, and eventually, being entirely in the emperor's hands, sentence of death was pronounced upon him. His daughter earnestly pleaded for his life, and at last, having obtained an audience with the emperor, she fell upon her knees before him. "My girl," said the emperor, "it is of no use to plead for your father, for I have the clearest evidence of his repeated crimes, and it is but justice that he should die." The girl replied, "Sire, I do not ask for justice, I beg for mercy. It is upon the mercifulness of your heart and not upon the justice of the case that I rely." She was heard patiently, and her father's life was spared at her request. Imitate this appeal, and cry, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness." Justice owes you nothing but death, mercy alone can spare you. Have done with every idea of making out a good case: admit it to be a bad one and plead guilty. Cast yourself upon the mercy of the court and ask for mercy, free mercy, undeserved mercy, gratuitous favour: this is what you must ask for, and as in law they have a form of suing called *in formâ pauperis*, that is, in the form of a pauper, do you adopt the method, and as a man full of necessities do you beg for favour at the hands of God, *in formâ pauperis*, and it shall be bestowed upon you.

IV. Now I close this discourse with the next point, which is, THE DOCTRINE HAS A GREAT SANCTIFYING INFLUENCE. "There," says one, "I do not believe that. Surely you have been holding out a premium to sin by saying that Christ came to save nobody but sinners, and does not call anybody to repentance but the sinful." My dear sirs, I have heard all that sort of talk so many times that I know it by heart; the same objections were raised against this doctrine in Luther's day by the Papists, and since then by workmongers of all classes. There is nothing substantial in their notion that free grace is opposed to morality: it is only their fancy. They dream that the doctrine of justification by faith will lead to sin, but it can be proved by history that whenever this doctrine has been best preached men have become most holy, and whenever this truth has been darkened, all manner of corruption has abounded. Gracious doctrine and gracious living fitly go together, and legal teaching and unlawful living are generally found associated.

Let us show you the sanctifying power of this gospel. Its first operation in that direction is this: when the Holy Spirit brings the truth of free pardon home to a man it *completely changes his thoughts concerning God*. "What," says he, "has God freely forgiven me all my offences for Christ's sake? And does he love me notwithstanding all my sin? I did not know he was such an one as this, so gracious and kind! I thought he was hard; I called him a tyrant, gathering where he had not strewed; but does he feel towards me like this?" "Then," saith the soul, "I love him in return." There is a complete revulsion of feeling; the man is turned right round as soon as ever he understands redeeming grace and dying love. Conversion follows on a sight of grace.

Moreover, this grand truth does more than turn a man, it *inspires, melts, enlivens, and inflames him*. This is a truth which stirs the depths of the heart, and fills the man with lively emotions. You talked to him about doing good, and about right, and justice, and reward, and punishment, and he heard it all, and it may have it had a measure of influence

over him, but he did not deeply feel it. Such teaching is too cold to warm the heart. The truth which comes home to the man appears to him to be new and exciting. It runs like this,—God out of his free mercy forgives the guilty, and he has forgiven you. Why, this awakens him, stirs him up, touches the fountain of his tears, and moves his whole being. Perhaps at the first hearing of the gospel he does not care for it, and even hates it, but when it comes with power it obtains a wonderful mastery over him. When he really receives its message as his own, then his cold heart of stone is turned to flesh; warm emotion, tender love, humble desire, and a sacred longing after the Lord are all excited in his bosom. The quickening power of this divine truth, as well as the converting power of it, can never be too much admired.

Besides, this truth when it enters the heart *deals a deadly blow at the man's self-conceit*. Many a man would have become wise only he thought he was so already; and many a man would have been virtuous only he concluded that he had already attained thereto. Behold, this doctrine smites upon the skull all confidence in your own goodness, and makes you feel your guilt; and in so doing it removes the great evil of pride. A sense of sin is the very threshold of mercy. A consciousness of shortcoming, a grief because of past offences, is a necessary preparation for a higher and a nobler life. The gospel digs out the foundation, makes a great vacuum, and so makes room to lay in their places the glorious stones of a noble spiritual character.

Moreover, where this truth is received there is sure to spring up in the soul *a sense of gratitude*. The man who has had much forgiven will be sure to love much in return. Gratitude to God is a grand main-spring for holy action. Those who do right in order to be rewarded for it are acting selfishly. Selfishness is at the bottom of their character, they abstain from sin only lest self should suffer, and they obey only that self may be safe and happy. The man who does right, not because of heaven or hell, but because God has saved him, and he loves the God who saved him, is the truly right-loving man. He who loves right because God loves it has risen out of the bog of selfishness and is capable of the loftiest virtue, yea, he has in him a living spring, which will well up and flow forth in holy living so long as he exists.

And, dear brethren, I think you will all see that free forgiveness to sinners is very conducive towards one part of a true character, namely, *readiness to forgive others*, for he who has been forgiven much himself is the very man who finds it easy to pass by the transgressions of others. If he do not so he may well doubt whether he has been himself forgiven; but if the Lord has blotted out his debt of a thousand talents he will readily enough forgive the hundred pence which his brother owes him.

Last of all, some of us know, and we wish that all knew by personal experience, that a sense of undeserved favour and free forgiveness is *the very soul of enthusiasm*, and enthusiasm is to Christianity what the life-blood is to the body. Were you ever made enthusiastic by a cold discourse upon the excellence of morality? Did you ever feel your soul stirred within you by listening to a sermon upon the rewards of virtue? Were you ever made enthusiastic by being told of the punishments of the law? No, sirs; but preach up the doctrines of grace, let the free favour of

God be extolled, and mark the consequences. There are people who will walk for many miles and stand without weariness by the hour together to hear this. I have known them labour many a weary mile to listen to this doctrine. What for? Because the man was eloquent, or because he put it well? Not so: it has sometimes been badly spoken, and in uncouth language, and yet this doctrine has always aroused the people. There is something in the soul of man that is looking out for the gospel of grace, and when it comes there is a hungering to hear about it. Look at the Reforming times, when death was the penalty of listening to a sermon: how the people crowded at midnight; how they journeyed into the deserts and the caves to listen to the teaching of these grand old truths. There is sweetness about mercy, divine mercy, freely given, which holds the ear of man and stirs his heart. When this truth enters the soul it breeds zealots, martyrs, confessors, missionaries, saints. If any Christians are in earnest, and full of love to God and man, they are those who know what grace has done for them. If any remain under reproaches faithful, under losses and crosses joyful, they are those who are conscious of their indebtedness to divine love. If any delight in God while they live, and rest in him as they die, they are the men who know that they are justified by faith in Jesus Christ who justifieth the ungodly. All glory be to the Lord, who lifteth the beggar from the dunghill and setteth him among princes, even the princes of his people. He takes the very cast-offs of the world and adopts them into his family, and makes them heirs of God by Jesus Christ. The Lord give us all to know the power of the gospel upon our sinful selves. The Lord endear to us the name, work, and person of the Sinner's Friend. May we never forget the hole of the pit whence we were drawn, nor the hand which rescued us, nor the undeserved kindness which moved that hand. Henceforth let us have more and more to say of infinite grace. "Free grace and dying love." We do the negro song say, "Ring those charming bells." Free grace and dying love—the sinner's windows of hope! Our hearts exult in the very words. Glory be unto thee, O Lord Jesus, ever full of compassion. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—152, 545, 289.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GUILE FORSAKEN WHEN GUILT IS FORGIVEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MARCH 25TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."—Psalm xxxii. 2.

THE only blessing the law can give it bestows on those who do no iniquity, and walk perfectly in God's ways: the gospel alone has a blessing for the guilty. On them upon their believing in Jesus it pronounces the benediction, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." To be "blessed" is to be in the most desirable state, at ease with God, happy in yourself and full of divine favour. A man cannot be more than blessed, or, what if I say, doubly blessed? since a benediction is pronounced twice. Nor is it a stinted blessing, for no limiting word is put before it or after it to mark an inferior benediction. When our Lord opened his mouth in the Sermon on the Mount he poured forth a stream of blessings, and even so doth the gospel when it speaks to the soul, rivers of blessing flow from its every word. The language of the text is very emphatic in the original, and implies a multiplication of blessings. There cannot be a more true, real, and assured blessedness than that which belongs to the forgiven sinner. All the blessedness which could have come to a perfect man does come to the man whose transgression is forgiven. O thou who hast sinned against God, and art conscious of it, rejoice that thou art nevertheless not shut out from blessedness; for if by faith thou canst believe in the sin-forgiving God, and accept the matchless atonement which covers all thy guilt, and thou wilt exercise faith upon that blessed system by which sin is no longer imputed, then art thou even now among the blessed. God himself has blessed thee, and neither men nor devils can reverse the benediction.

Now, mark that at the very same time that the guilt of sin is taken away and blessedness is bestowed it happeneth unto the forgiven man that he undergoes a change of nature. The work of the Spirit is linked

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with the work of the Son: when the Son removes guilt the Spirit removes guile. He who takes away our offences also cures our deceit. When we begin to be believers we cease to be liars. He who was aforetime crafty as Jacob no sooner receives the blessing of the Lord in answer to prayer than he becomes "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

It is to this fact that I am going to draw your attention at this time, and as I desire to use it as a means for self-examination and arousing, I pray the Holy Ghost to apply it with power to many souls.

You must all have noticed in David's case that after he had fallen into his foul sin with Bathsheba he ceased to exhibit that transparent truth-speaking character which had charmed us so much before. Until he had obtained a sense of pardon for his great crime, David was as crooked and perverse as well could be. Guile was as abundant in him as guilt; for he made no confession of his sin, and would not allow himself to see the heinousness of it; but he must have put a fearful strain upon his conscience to have hushed its protests against his grievous offence. Perhaps even months passed without any honest acknowledgment to his own conscience and to God that he had so foully sinned. His entire endeavours were concentrated upon the concealment of his crime, and to that end all his wits were set to work with horrible cunning. What crafty devices he practised in seeking to hide his sin, such as bringing Uriah back and making him drunk. Could this be David—the honest and conscientious David of former days? Could he have become so mean, so full of low scheming? Could he be the psalmist who sung so sweetly? Could he deliberately plan the death of the man whom he had so fearfully wronged? Yes, and worse, when Uriah, being wilfully exposed to danger, fell in battle, David manifested no compunction, nor uttered a word by way of confession, but he put it off with apparent indifference, saying, "the sword devoureth one as well as another." He knew right well how Uriah came to die, and Joab knew also, and yet he trumped up a message, as if nothing had been arranged between them beforehand. Ah, David, what a deceitful heart thou hadst, and how didst thou practice guile upon guile! Yea, so blind had his mental vision become as to his own sinfulness that, when Nathan outlined a picture which was the very photograph of his own case, he did not see it; but pronounced a fierce sentence against the supposed culprit. It needed the prophet to come forward and to say, "Thou art the man" before that guileful heart of David was able to perceive that Nathan spake of him. Yes, sin gives a twist to our entire manhood, and makes us play thousand tricks both with our conscience and with God. But notice, as soon as ever Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die," David became another man; he wrote the 51st Psalm, which is one of the most honest pieces of writing that ever fell from human pen. How plain-spoken it is all through! How bare is the penitent's bosom! In it you do not so much hear the sound of vibrating harp-strings as of throbbing, breaking heart-strings. All through it the man's soul is throbbing over at his lips and at his eyes; concealment and trickery are quite out of the field. Pardoned sin makes an honest heart, but when sin is unconfessed and unforgiven the serpent rules within, and, with twist, and wriggle, and wind, and turn in a thousand deceitful ways.

My first head-to-night is this—*many men play tricks with God and their consciences*; and, secondly, *the forgiven man gives evidence of having missed from this evil habit*—"In his spirit there is no guile."

I. While I speak upon my first head—that **MANY MEN PLAY TRICKS WITH GOD AND THEIR CONSCIENCES**, I shall be very glad if you will each carefully notice how much of what is said belongs to you personally. I want to be very honest with you, but I should be sorry to be unjust. Do not take home what does not apply to you, but anything which is really yours I pray you to lay to heart. Court the entrance of truth, even though it should cut you to the quick. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Avail yourselves of the opportunity which the Lord is now affording you to search our hearts, as in the presence of the Lord who weigheth the spirits. May the Holy Spirit aid us in this business.

The guile of the human heart shows itself in a *refusal to come to serious consideration*. Men cannot be induced to examine themselves and to look to the state of affairs between God and their souls; we press them to it, and plead with them even to tears but they refuse to do themselves this necessary service. They are more or less conscious that something is very wrong, but they have no mind to enquire. Is this truthful? Is it reasonable? If their house were reported to be on fire, would they not see to it? But no, they could not enjoy the fool's paradise of false peace if they were seriously to think and enquire, and therefore they prefer to take matters easily and ignore as much as possible all that is unsatisfactory about their condition and prospects. From week to week there is no calling of conscience to account; Sabbaths follow one another, and though there may be a little occasional awakening there is no resolute determination to cast up accounts and find out the soul's actual condition. They prefer to shut their eyes and stop their ears rather than see signs and hear tidings which would distress them. What childishness is this! It is worse; it is dishonesty to their souls and God. When a steward declines to render an account you may easily guess the reason. When a shipmaster refuses to have his vessel surveyed you shrewdly suspect the sea-worthiness of the ship. When a merchant does not care to look into his books you judge on which side the balance has turned. Honest men are prepared to go into matters, and are willing to see the naked truth, but men who are not brave enough to face uncomfortable facts play the foolish game of bandaging their eyes. Putting the telescope to the blind eye and declaring that you see nothing is an old trick, and commonly practised even now. May we never be suffered to persevere in the self-deception which is supported by a heedless disregard of warnings. Most men will do anything sooner than think about eternal things. The most frivolous amusements, the most stupid songs, the most carking cares, and even the most weary ceremonials of fashions, are adopted as a happy release from the labour of reflection. Death, judgment, eternity, heaven, and hell—they dare not think of these: and why? Because they know hat all is wrong with them, and so they practise a crafty carelessness and a cunning indifference.

Others who do think a little are *partial in their judgments of themselves*. They present accounts, but these are cooked and made to

appear other than they should be by a sort of spiritual financing. Ungodly men colour all that they do with a rosy tint, and endeavour to be gratified with the appearance of their lives. Is it not very usual for business men, when their financial position is becoming more and more unsound, to make a show of prosperity in order to keep up their credit? Doubtful investments are reckoned as available assets, and heavy liabilities are toned down by clever adjustments. Public companies often show us fine specimens of the art of colouring. Alas, that reasonable beings should practise this art upon themselves in relation to their most vital interests: yet they do so year after year. They put darkness for light and light for darkness, and reckon themselves to be rich and increased with goods, while they are naked and poor and miserable. Well skilled are many in the method of "making the worse appear the better reason"; they exaggerate any little excellence which they think they possess, and greatly under-estimate their faults. They deny, or extenuate, or altogether excuse their sin; they blame their nature, or their circumstances, or the tempter, but they themselves must be excused. How could they help sinning? Others would have done the same had they been in their position, why then should they be blamed? Moreover, what they did was not so very bad after all, and there are all their good deeds as a set off against the bad. Men use false weights and deceitful balances when they are dealing with their souls, and they will not endure honest handling. They cry "peace, peace" where there is no peace, and prophesy smooth things for themselves. Like the unjust steward, they permit false statements to be made of what is due to their Lord, and when they come up to their false standard they congratulate themselves as if they were the pink of honesty.

Again, many are evidently tricking themselves wilfully because *they rest on such frivolous grounds of confidence*. Could any man depend on his own good works unless he had juggled with his judgment? What think you? Do you believe that any man would build his hope for eternity upon his being christened when he was a baby, and his having taken the communion at certain seasons since, if he were not anxious to be deceived? Do you think that any man, unless willingly duped, could believe that he was made a child of God by an outward ceremony? Do you think any man would rely upon sacraments unless he desired to be misled? If any mortal man believes in absolution given to him by a fellow sinner who calls himself a priest, is he not willingly deceived? If any man relies upon outward performances as a means for the putting away of sin, do you think he has not sense enough in him, if he chose to use it, to know that this is utter absurdity? True, many are duped by the teachings of others, but, if they possess even so much as a trace of brain, might they not see through such false teaching if they chose? If a man would sit down and only think, would he not see that confidences based upon such frail foundations are as sure to fall as houses built upon the sand? But, alas, multitudes of men play such tricks with themselves that they are led by the nose by the servants of Antichrist. They see that others yield their assent to the pretensions of priests, and they conclude that they will go with the many; it is inconvenient to be too particular, and so they leap with the majority. But what a wretched

of doing business, and how hollow the peace which comes of it. Men trust their souls upon statements so flimsy that they would not risk a crown upon them. There is guile at the bottom of this, and those who profess to be easy in these confidences are not so. Sirs, there is no honest man in his peace but the man who gained it through the blood of Christ. If you come to testing and trying, all other confidences you save confidence in the Christ of God; but the sinner is full of guile and does not want to test and try; like the simple, he believeth the word because it would be tedious to discriminate, and troublesome to get a good report.

Some men practise guile in another way. *They avoid all home truths, and are clear of searching doctrines.* If they hear a faithful sermon, and it is home to them, do you know what they say? "The preacher is very harsh. I could not hear a man like that. I want more."

Of course they cannot abide a ministry which reveals their true state for "he that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved." Only honest hearts ask to have that searching word which lays bare the thoughts and intents of the heart, but gracious men know that to be turned inside out by a searching discourse is the very thing they need, and they are grateful to the honest man of God who will not spare them.

Some persons must be very foolish who prefer a doctor who, when they are dreadfully diseased and near to death, nevertheless flatteringly says, "Oh, this is but a small matter; I shall soon set you right. Here is a wonderful pill; take a certain quantity of boxes and you will be speedily restored. I have seen many cases worse than yours completely cured." The poor wretch is almost in his grave, and yet he promises himself long life. Sensible men hate such a deceiver. Rational men choose a trustworthy physician who will, so far as he knows, tell them what ails them, and not bolster them up in falsehood. So, if men would but let their senses exercise themselves on the best things, they would prize an honest teacher and prize his faithful warnings, and be glad that things should be put plainly, even if harshly, lest haply they should be in self-deception. Very commonly we meet with people foolish enough to endeavour to turn the edge of an unpalatable home truth by finding fault with the preacher. He is too censorious, and that is an excuse for remaining in spiritual apathy: he blundered in pronunciation, or grammar, or style, and that is tacitly placed as an excuse for rejecting the gospel which he preached. Even books come in for their censures. The plain-speaking volume is not "conceived in a spirit," or is too narrow, bigoted, and one-sided. The witness is not because he prophesies only evil. If the sinner cannot escape the reproach of his conscience, he will raise a deal of dust and throw handfuls of it upon those who seek his good, so that in the smother he may find a retreat. Ah, foolish trickery!

Around this, many are clever at *parrying home thrusts by introducing other themes.* Many imitate the Samaritan woman at the well. When first she began to unveil her character and touch her conscience about her five husbands of hers, she sought to change the subject by the remark, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem men ought to worship." Thus with questions about rites

or ceremonies, or doctrines, or types, or prophecies, men shield themselves from the blows of the Spirit's sword. A brother minister told me some time ago that he visited a woman whose husband had died very suddenly, and he found that she had at one time been an attendant upon his ministry. She was sitting in the room, with her brother, who was an elder of the Scotch church, who began at once somewhat harshly to remind her of her negligence of Christian ordinances: the woman evidently feared that the minister would follow in the same strain, and so she cleverly warded off the expected attack by stating that she had a great difficulty which she could by no means get over. The minister had no idea of rebuking her while just newly made a widow, but her conscience was evidently putting her into a state of alarm, and so she again interrupted the minister's kindly earnest remarks by saying, "But still, ye see, sir, I cannot get my mind easy about this one thing. In the Shorter Catechism it says, that God is without beginning, and I cannot understand how that can be. That he should be without end I can understand, but that he should be without beginning is quite beyond me." "Well," said the pastor, "my good soul, I do not think that this is quite the time to talk about such a mysterious matter. You see the Lord has removed your husband from you, and it is well for us to hear the voice of the rod." It was of no use, for the woman held to her shield, and repeated that still she could not understand how God could be without a beginning. At last her brother, the elder, silenced her objection, by saying, "Woman, what are you at? To make such a fuss about a plain subject. Of course the Lord never had a beginning, and he never needed any, for he was always there." This for awhile silenced that particular form of cavilling, but before long the woman was at the same mode of defence. You know how the lapwing pretends to have a broken wing, and flies as if it must be taken and all with the view of leading the passenger from her nest, so do our hearers try to lead us away from the main matter. When comparing notes about the way in which the unconverted meet us when we try to deal personally with them, ministers can all bear witness to the cleverness of many in the art of turning the switch and shunting the conversation. You know how it has been with some of you when you have been hardly pressed, you have crept under the doctrine of election, you have hidden in the dark corner of predestination, or dodged the gospel behind some theory of free agency. This is sheer trickery, a display of evil subtlety, exceedingly mischievous. What would it help you if you could understand all mysteries? As long as you are unreconciled to God, what does it matter about what you understand or do not understand? Is it not your business to confess your sin, and go and seek mercy at the hands of the Most High, and what degree of knowledge will excuse you if you neglect this chief duty? Those points which are worth your knowing God will teach you in due time by his Spirit, I beseech you attend to the main business, which is that you should be saved from sin by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Another very cunning trick which is often practised by sinners who are full of guile is this, they *pass on to other people anything which is uncomfortably applicable to themselves*. It seemed as if the preacher had made a cap specially to fit that head, but the result was that the

person who watched the making exclaimed, "Dear me! How well he has taken my neighbour's measure." The letter is meant for him, but he puts it in another envelope, drops it into his friend's letter-box and runs away. If there be a solemn warning for unregenerate men he does not see its bearing on himself, but he perceives somebody in the crowd who needs just such a serious word, and he hopes that it will be useful to him. You will hear him sometimes say after a sermon in which almost every point has been put personally to himself, "I cannot think how our friend Smith could keep his seat while the pastor was dealing so faithfully with him." "Thou art the man" is an application as much needed now as ever, for it is one of the common tricks of sinners to get another to wear their robes that they themselves may pass unwounded through the battle. Alas for such wretched guile.

One sorry piece of craft which Satan teaches to many is to make them *doubt, or pretend to doubt, anything in Scripture which frowns upon them*. If they find that dying as they are they will be driven from the presence of God for ever, they comfort themselves by recollecting that a wise man has discovered that everlasting does not mean for ever, and they hear that a clever divine has found out that there is to be a general jail delivery in hell, and everybody is to be admitted into heaven in due time. They hear this and they hear that, and as drowning men catch at straws so do they cling to any new inventions which promise them ease in their sins. They lay the flattering unction of false doctrine to their souls as if it were the balm of Gilead. "Perhaps it may be so," they say, and thus they risk their future happiness upon so poor a chance as the hope that, perhaps, these modern thinkers may turn out to be right, and the plain teaching of Scripture prove to be a mistake. It is a wonderfully easy thing to make yourself out to be an honest sceptic, and from this earthwork to assail your assailants, and yet all the while you may have no doubt at all, but in the core of your heart may, like the devil, believe and tremble. Ah, ye pretended doubters, if you were stretched on a dying bed you would believe the old revelation fast enough, and begin to cry out for mercy in the scare which the approach of death would bring upon you. Half the men who talk so much about their not believing, believe a great deal more than they would like to admit, and they dare not test their own imaginary infidelity by spending an hour alone in their chamber at eventide and looking into their own hearts. There are many hypocritical believers, but are there not quite as many pretended unbelievers to whom doubting is a mere sop to quiet the Cerberus of their conscience? Guile plays its part with the human intellect, and conjures up an army of ghosts in the form of doubts, but when the sun of truth arises they immediately disappear.

Let us examine another product of the guile of the natural heart. While yet they are far from God *many calm and quiet themselves with outward religion*. They never pray in sincerity, neither does their heart speak at any time with God, and yet they dare not go to bed at night without kneeling down at their bedside and repeating a form of prayer. They never yet repented of sin, and yet they will repeat words of confession the most humble. They do not praise the Lord in sincerity, and yet their voices may be heard in psalm and hymn. On the

Sabbath-day they go up to the house of God, and sit there, and do as God's people do, and they would not be easy if they did not do so; and yet their heart is in none of the worship. Far be it from me to discourage even outward reverence, but it is a strange cheat that a man puts upon himself when he supposes that mere formal, heartless worship can be a reason for peace of mind. To have mocked God with solemn sounds upon a thoughtless tongue ought not to be a ground of comfort. Repeating words of prayer without life and feeling should rather move us to self-condemnation than to self-congratulation. How can men feel content with rending their garments when the Lord bids them rend their hearts? O sirs, if you do not pray with your hearts what are all your forms worth? What are bended knees without broken hearts? If you do not indeed repent of sin and lay hold on Christ, what are all your church goings, or your chapel goings, however constant they may be? Of what good can external religiousness be to you while you deny to God the homage of your minds? And yet too many wrap themselves up in this garment of guile.

There are others who conceal in the secret of their hearts a blasphemous notion which they hardly dare to put into words, but it amounts to this that *the reason why they are not saved is not by any means due to themselves*. They reject the Saviour and refuse to leave their sins, but they are not to blame for it; in fact—only they dare not actually say so—they insinuate that the blame of their condition lies with God himself. They have been waiting, but grace has not come: *they* are quite ready, but God is not. They are poor victims of adverse fate, and rather to be pitied than condemned: so they endeavour to make out for themselves. Distorted truth is used to support their egregious falsehood, and conscience is drugged into a dangerous slumber. Thus do men cozen themselves out of their souls with sophistical arguments forged by him who from the beginning is a murderer and a liar. Be not hoodwinked by this slanderous falsehood, but read God's word where he declares, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he turn unto me and live." He testifies that he waiteth to be gracious, and all the day long stretches out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying generation. What a strong delusion is this when men dare to lay their blood at God's door, and make him to be the author of their sin! In their consciences they know better, but their inward crookedness delights in lies.

Perhaps the most numerous victims of this guile are those who *flatter themselves that they will come right some day*. They have been hearers of the gospel for twenty years and are not saved, but they have a full persuasion that they shall not die as they now are. They nurse the fond idea that one of these days it will be convenient for them to seek the Lord. The convenient day has never come yet, but still they think it will. There will be a favoured hour and a peculiar time, and they half promise that it shall not be very much longer delayed. O ye who play at procrastination, ye are knaves to your own souls. Look ye to it. If you resolve that you will repent in a year's time, what is that but a daring defiance of God by declaring that you will continue in sin for twelve months at least? Have you ever looked at it in that light? Even if a man knew that he could live a year, and that on this day twelve

months he could carry out his resolution to become a Christian, yet if he could make such a resolution, what would it amount to but this—"I mean for twelve months to refuse the Saviour's claims, and remain an enemy to God"? Do you think that he who thus resolves is in a hopeful condition? If he be determined for twelve months to rebel against his Lord, do you not prognosticate that at the end of the year he will be a worse man, and be even less likely to yield himself to God? Thus have I exposed a few of the many "knavish tricks" by which our unrenewed hearts manifest their guile. May God the eternal spirit bless the searching word to all who are deceiving themselves.

II. But now, secondly, THE PARDONED MAN GIVES EVIDENCE OF CEASING FROM THIS GUILT, for, in the first place, *he makes an open confession of his sin to God*. Here he stands before the Most High, and cries, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," for he feels his guiltiness. He takes his fault and criminality to himself, and does not cloak his iniquity. He owns that he has sinned against heaven and in the presence of the Most High. This he does all the more freely because he has no motive to do otherwise. Why should he hide his sin? There is full forgiveness for him. Why should he deny it when the precious blood of Christ is ready to put it all away? I think the most honest confession is that which falls from the believer's lip when he gazes upon the

"fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins."

There," says a creditor to his debtor, "you owe me a great deal of money, but if you will bring me the account I will receipt it all." My friend, would you not willingly put down all you owed in such a case? Oh, I think you would rather put down too much than too little when such a promise was before you. You would be afraid lest you should overlook anything, and would be eager to make a clean breast of all your liabilities. And so when the Lord Jesus gives a full pardon to our soul that believes in him it is sure to be met with a full confession. How could it be otherwise?

The pardoned man has also *done with all sorts of excuses and palliations*. He does not try to set his virtues in a brighter light than that of truth, or to make his sins appear less heinous than they are; but he confesses all their guilt, and heartily humbles himself in the sight of God. The lowliest words in the language he loves best; the lowest place in the synagogue is his choice: once he boasted that he was almost a saint, but now he owns that he is altogether a sinner. You shall hear no extenuations, excuses, or denials now. The man be- holds the pardon of God, and it makes him honest. Now *he desires to show the worst of his case*, and longs to be searched and probed. He who has found peace through Jesus Christ surrenders the keys of the most secret chambers of his soul, and asks for inspection. "O Lord," saith he, "I pray thee make sure work with my case. I beseech thee it from my heart this dreadful cancer of sin, even though the painful knife must follow every rootlet of the hideous evil, for I desire truth in the inward parts and the complete eradication of the love of sin. He is not content to make clean the outside of the cup and the platter,

and leave the inward part filthy, but he cries for inward cleansing and for renewal in the hidden fountains of thought and action. Now he courts divine investigation, and begs his Redeemer to let the winnowing fan discover and remove his chaff. Now would he put himself in the full blaze of Jehovah's light, and desire the consuming fire to burn up his dross. He cultivates heart-searching, and practises daily repentance; a lowly estimate of himself he continually desires, because he feels that self-abhorrence endears Christ to his heart as the great Saviour of unworthy ones. He would rather have a little true grace than abound in great pretensions, and he considers the lowest place among the children of God to be better than he deserves.

Sincerity has also entered into the sinner's belief in the terrible things of God's word. He now sees their certainty and their justice, and does not pretend to question them; he is one who trembles at the word of the Lord, and he leaves the cavillers to do their daring work alone. He knows in his own conscience that there is a hell, he confesses also that it is just that there should be such a place of punishment, and he only wonders that he has not been driven there himself.

Such a man now *wishes to be dealt with personally and impartially* whenever he reads a book or hears a sermon. He does not want the preacher to speak to others and leave him out; nay, but he has come hungering and thirsting after the Word and he opens his mouth and pants for his portion; and if instead of getting comfort he is to receive rebuke, he is reverently ready to receive it so long as it shall be for his real good. He is ready to take bitter medicine, for he is anxious to be healed. He lays bare his breast, for he desires the heavenly surgeon to inflict any wound sooner than leave the heart of stone within his flesh. He delights in the searching Word, and the more closely it tries and tests him the more thankful he is for it.

The pardoned man also *desires in everything that he does to be true.* He is often afraid to pray in public lest he should say more than he feels. When he rises from his knees in private he frequently questions himself—"Has it been real devotion? Did I really mean all that I said?" He catechises himself lest he should be a hypocrite. And I have known a man, whose sins have been pardoned, when he has dared to preach a sermon, sit down afterwards and take all his sentences to pieces lest he should have said more than he altogether knew and actually felt, for he was exceedingly afraid of going beyond the line of his actual knowledge. The saved soul hates paste gems and mimic jewels; he desires to have true precious stones or none at all. He is afraid of shams. He wants to be real in all things, and hence he sometimes doubts his own safety, because he is in the habit of pulling himself to pieces, to dissect his heart and to see whether it is sound all through. This habit may be carried to excess, but in itself it is an exceedingly good one. It is infinitely better than the dishonesty of setting down all our guilt as gold.

The really pardoned man also *desires to be rid of all sin.* I know some who can never hope to obtain forgiveness, for they continue in their iniquity. Can a woman expect to find peace with God while she goes on taking her sly drop and becoming intoxicated in private? Can a man find joy in God who still clings to the drunkard's vice? Will God

receive into his favour those who continue to practice dishonesty in trade? Shall sin be fondled and yet pardoned? No one dares to expect it, and yet deceitful hearts attempt to think so. They will condemn other people's pet sins, and yet excuse their own. They pretend to much sorrow for sin in general, and yet hold to one favourite sin in particular. Their delicate Agag must live. Kill all the rest, but surely as to this one the bitterness of death has passed! O sirs, be not deceived; you must be willing for all sin to go. If you desire one sin to live you will not live yourself. The honest-hearted sinner—he whom the Lord absolves of iniquity—desires to see all his sins brought forth and hung up like the kings whom Joshua found in the cave at Makedah—hung up in the face of the sun that they might die the death.

“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee.”

We are not perfect, but every really pardoned man wishes that he were so. Though there are sins into which we fall there are no sins which we love. Though we come short of the glory of God, yet we do not rest happy in falling short, and we can never be wholly content till it is no longer so with us. Beloved, the pardoned man is cleansed from the guile which would ask for quarter for darling sins.

He seeks after perfect purity of life, and he has heartily ceased from guile, for now as an heir of heaven *he lives in the presence of God*, and delights to remember the all-seeing eye. Now, he does not say to God, “Depart from me: I desire not the knowledge of thy ways,” but he looks upon every action of every day as done before his Father's face. He wants nothing but truth, and that which will bear the test of the judgment day. Beloved, I can well understand why a pardoned man becomes a man without guile—because his pardon is a real pardon; there is no fiction in it. God justifies him, but he does not justify him by a subterfuge, as some have blasphemously ventured to say. No, but there is my sin, Christ took it and was punished for it, and therefore my sin was honestly put away without any violation of justice, for Christ has made a full atonement for it, and so my sin has justly ceased to be. Why, with such an honest foundation as that, an honest pardon may well make an honest man. God makes the believer righteous—righteous beyond dispute. His faith is counted to him for righteousness, seeing he hath believed in Jesus Christ, and that is a righteousness which, at the last great day, will stand the test of the most searching enquiry. The man is saved on honest principles, and therefore, henceforth, there are no tricks for him. He stands erect and fears no accuser, while he cries, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

The lesson from the whole is this: be honest. Sinner, may God make you honest. Do not deceive yourself. Make a clean breast of it before God. Have an honest religion, or have none at all. Have

a religion of the heart, or else have none. Put aside the mere vestment and garment of piety, and let your soul be right within. Be honest.

And you that are Christian men recollect that your blessedness will never be enjoyed by yourselves unless you continue to be without guile. Some Christian men live rather by policy than by honesty; I hope they are Christians, but I am not sure, for their life is full of scheming. They never go straight; they would not care to go straight: they rather like going a little round about just to show that they can dodge in and out. There are men of this sort in business, and you need not go out of your road to meet them. Even their thinking seems to revolve on a wheel—all round about and round about. Now, friends, you will never be happy while you act craftily. The only life in which a man can enjoy the blessedness of pardoned sin is a downright straightforward life. Be like clear glass, so that all who choose to do so may see right through you. There is a way of living guardedly, in which you never speak your mind, but are diplomatic and reserved; you take your words out of your mouth and look at them, and judge what other people will think of them, and then you put the best of them back again. There is a system of living, as it were, in armour, buckled up with your vizor down; you never dare show your real self, but maintain great prudence and reserve. What is this but to live in fetters? I would sooner die at once. "I would as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself." To speak his heart, and to act honestly is to a true believer the path of peace and happiness. If any man choose another path, and try diplomacy and policy, so he may, but as sure as he lives he will come to a sorrowful ending, and find that such a course is not a way which God approves, nor will he let his servants have peace in it. God of his infinite mercy bring us all to follow Jesus, trusting in his blood, and treading in his footsteps; and to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—*Psalms li.*

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HOW IS SALVATION RECEIVED?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 1ST, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all."—Romans iv. 16.

WE shall turn during yet another Sabbath morning to one of the great vital truths of the gospel. I feel it to be important more and more to bring forward the fundamental doctrines, since they are in certain quarters placed so much in the background. I met with a remark the other day that even the evangelical pulpit needs to be evangelized: I am afraid it is too true, and therefore we will give such prominence to the gospel, and to its central doctrine of justification by faith, that no such remark shall be applicable to us. We have heard it said that if an instrument could be invented which would serve the same purpose towards sermons as the lactometer does towards milk, you would with great difficulty be able to discover any trace of the unadulterated milk of the Word in large numbers of modern discourses. I shall not subscribe to any sweeping censure, but I am afraid there is too much ground for the accusation. In abundance of sermons the polish of the rhetoric is greatly in excess of the weight of the doctrine, and "the wisdom of words" is far more conspicuous than the cross of Christ.

Besides, the gospel is always wanted. There are always some persons who urgently need it, and will perish unless they receive it. It is a matter of hourly necessity. There may be finer and more artistic things to speak about than the simplicities of Christ, but there are certainly no more useful and requisite things. The sign-posts at the cross roads bear very simple words, generally consisting of the names of the towns and villages to which the roads lead; but if these were painted out and their places supplied with stanzas from Byron, or stately lines from Milton, or deep thoughts from Cowper or Young, I am afraid there would be grievous complaints from persons losing their way. They would declare that however excellent the poetry might be they thought

it an impertinence to mock them with a verse when they needed plain directions as to the king's highway. So let those who will indulge in poetical thoughts and express them in high-flown language, it shall be ours to set up the hand-posts marking out the way of salvation, and to keep them painted in letters large and plain, so that he who runs may read.

There is another reason for giving the gospel over and over, again and again. It is the reason which makes the mother tell her child twenty times, namely, because nineteen times are not enough. Men are so forgetful about the things of Christ, and their minds are so apt to start aside from the truth, that when they have learned the gospel they are very easily bewitched by falsehood, and are readily deceived by that "other gospel" which is not another: therefore we need to give them "line upon line and precept upon precept." I scarcely remember the old rustic rhyme, but I recollect hearing it sung in my boyish days when the country people were dibbling beans, and according to the old plan were putting three into each hole,—I think it ran thus—

"One for the worm and one for the crow,
And let us hope the other will grow."

We must be content to plant many seeds in the hope that one will take root and bear fruit. The worm and crow are always at work, and will be sure to get their full share of our sowing, and therefore let us sow the more.

Come we, then, to our text and to the gospel of faith. Last Sabbath the theme was, For whom is the gospel meant? and the reply was, for sinners. The question to-day is, *How is the gospel received?* The answer is, *by faith*.

Our first head shall be, *the fact*,—"it is of faith": secondly, *the first reason for this*,—"that it might be by grace": and thirdly, *the further reason*,—"to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed."

I. First, then, here is THE FACT, *it is of faith*. What does the "it" refer to? *It is of faith*. If you will read the context, I think you will consider that it refers to the promise, although some have said that the antecedent word or thought is "the inheritance." This matters very little if at all: it may mean the inheritance, the covenant, or the promise, for these are one. To give a wide word which will take in all,—the blessedness which comes to a man in Christ, the blessedness promised by the covenant of grace is of faith: in one word, salvation is of faith.

And what is faith? It is believing the promise of God, taking God at his word, and acting upon that belief by trusting in him. Some of the Puritans used to divide faith, improperly but still instructively, into three parts. The first was self renunciation, which is, perhaps, rather a preparation for faith than faith itself, in which a man confesses that he cannot trust in himself, and so goes out of self and all confidence in his own good works. The second part of faith they said was reliance in which a man believing the promise of God trusts him, depends upon him, and leaves his soul in the Saviour's hands: and then the third part of faith they said was appropriation by which a man takes to himself that which God presents in the promise to the believer, appropriates

it as his own, feeds upon it, and enjoys it. Certainly there is no true faith without self-renunciation, reliance, and at least a measure of appropriation; where these three are found there is faith in the soul. We shall, however, better understand what faith is as we proceed with our subject, if God the Holy Ghost will be pleased to enlighten us. Dear friends, you can easily see that the blessing was of faith in Abraham's case, and it is precisely the same with all those who by faith are the children of believing Abraham.

First, *it was so in the case of Abraham.* Abraham obtained the promise by faith and not by works nor by the energy of the flesh. He relied alone upon the divine promise. We read in the seventeenth verse ("As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." Abraham's faith consisted in *believing the promise* of God, and this he did firmly and practically. He was far away in Chaldea when the Lord called him out and promised to give him a land and a seed, and straightway he went forth, not knowing whither he went. When he came into Canaan he had no settled resting place, but wandered about in tents, still believing most fully that the land wherein he sojourned as a stranger was his own. God promised to give him a seed, and yet he had no children. Year followed year, and in the course of nature he grew old and his wife was long past the age of childbearing, and yet there was no son born to them. When at last Ishmael was born his hope in that direction was dashed to the ground, for he was informed that the covenant was not with Ishmael. Believing Abraham had stepped aside to carnal expediency, and had hoped in that way to realise the lingering promise, but he had fourteen years more to wait, till he was a hundred years old, and till Sarah had reached her ninetieth year. Yet he believed the word of the Lord and fell upon his face and laughed with holy joy and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old?" So, too, when Isaac was born and grown up he believed that in Isaac should the covenant be established, nor did he doubt this when the Lord bade him take Isaac and offer him up as a sacrifice. He obeyed without questioning, believing that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead, or in some other way to keep his word of promise. Now consider that we have multiplied promises, and those written down in black and white in the inspired Word, which we may consult at any time we please, while Abraham had only now and then a verbal promise, and yet he clung to it and relied upon it. Though there was nothing else to rely upon, and neither sign nor evidence of any offspring to fulfil the promise that he should be heir of the world and father of many nations, yet he needed no other ground of confidence but that God had said it, and that he would make his word good.

There was in Abraham, also, *an eye to the central point of the promise*, the Messiah, Jesus, our Lord. I do not know that Abraham understood all the spiritual meaning of the covenant made with him, probably he did not; but he did understand that the Christ was to be born of him, in whom all nations should be blessed. When the Lord said that he would make him a blessing, and in him should all nations of the earth be blessed, I do not suppose Abraham saw all the fulness of that

marvellous word; but he did see that he was to be the progenitor of the Messiah. Our Lord himself is my authority for this assertion: "Abraham saw my day, he saw it and was glad." Though there appeared to this man, old and withered, with a wife ninety years of age, no likelihood that he should ever become a father, yet did he fully believe that he would be the father of many nations, and that upon no ground whatever but that the living God had so promised him, and therefore so it must be.

This faith of Abraham we find *considered no difficulties whatever*. "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief." Brethren, these were in themselves terrible difficulties, enough to make a man fear that the promise did but mock him, but Abraham did not consider anything beyond the promise and the God who gave it. The difficulties were for God to consider, and not for him. He knew that God had made the world out of nothing, and that he supported all things by the word of his power, and therefore he felt that nothing was too hard for him. His own advanced years and the age of his wife were of no consequence, he did not even take them into the reckoning, but saw only a faithful Almighty God, and felt content. O noble faith! Faith such as God deserves! Faith such as none render to him but those whom he calls by effectual grace! This it was which justified Abraham, and made him the father of believers.

Abraham's faith also *gave glory to God*. I stopped in the middle of the twentieth verse just now, but we must now complete the reading of it. "But was strong in faith, giving glory to God." God had promised, and he treated the Lord's promise with becoming reverence; he did not impiously suspect the Lord of falsehood, or of mocking his servant, or of uttering to-day what he might take back to-morrow. He knew that Jehovah is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Abraham glorified the truth of God, and at the same time he glorified his power. He was quite certain that the Lord had not spoken beyond his line, but that what he had promised he was able to perform. It belongs to puny man to speak more than he can do; fall often his tongue is longer than his arm; but with the Lord it is never so. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Abraham adoringly believed in the immutability, truth, and power of the living God, and looked for the fulfilment of his word.

All this strong, unstaggering faith which glorified God *rested upon the Lord alone*. You will see that it was so by reading the twenty-first verse. "Being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." There was nothing whatever in his house, his wife, himself, or anywhere else, which could guarantee the fulfilment of the promise. He had only God to look to: only, did I say—what could a man have more? Yet so it was, there were no signs, marks, tokens, or indications to substantiate the confidence of Abraham: he rested solely upon the unlimited power of God. And this, dear brethren, is the kind of faith which God loves and honours, which wants no signs,

marks, evidences, helps, or other buttresses to support the plain and bare word of the Lord; but simply knows that Jehovah has said it, and that he will make it good. Though all things should give the promise a lie, we believe in it because we believe in God. True faith ridicules impossibility, and pours contempt upon improbability, knowing that omnipotence and immutability cannot be thwarted or hindered. Has God said it? Then so it is. *Dictum! Factum! Spoken! Done!* These vain are one with the Most High.

Well, now, *the faith of every man who is saved must be of this character.* Every man who receives salvation receives it by a faith like that of Abraham, for, my brethren, when we are saved *we too take the promise of God and depend upon it.* To one believer one word of God is applied, to another another, but some sweet word, most sure and steadfast, discovered upon which we fix our hope, and find anchorage for our spirit. Yea, and as we search the word by faith we take each promise as we find it, and we say "this is true" and "this is true," and so we rest upon all of them. Is it not so with all of you who have peace with God? Did you not gain it by resting upon the promise of God as you found it in the word and as it was opened up to you by the Holy Spirit? Have you any other ground of confidence but God's promise? I know you have not, my brethren, nor do you desire any.

And we also believe in God over the head of great difficulties. If it was hard for Abraham to believe that a son should be born unto him, methinks it is harder for a poor burdened sinner, conscious of his great guilt, conscious that God must punish him also for that guilt, to believe nevertheless in the hopeful things which the gospel prophecies unto him. Can I believe that the righteous God is looking upon me, a sinner, with eyes of love? Can I believe that though I have offended him and broken all his laws he nevertheless waits to be gracious to me? While my heart is heavy and the prospect is black around me and I see nothing but a terrible hell to be my eternal portion, can I at such a time believe that God has planned my redemption and given his Son to die for me, and that now he invites me to come and receive a full, perfect, and immediate pardon at his hands? Can the gospel message be true to such a worthless rebel as I am? It seems as if the law and justice of God set themselves against the truth of such wonderful deeds of mercy as the gospel announces, and it is hard for a stricken heart to believe the report; but the faith which saves the soul believes the gospel promise in the teeth of all its alarms, and notwithstanding all the thunders of the law. Despite the trepidation of the awakened spirit, the Holy Spirit enables it to accept the great Father's word, to rest upon the repitiation which he has set forth, and to quiet itself with the firm persuasion that God for Christ's sake doth put away its sin.

At the same time another grand miracle is also believed in, namely, regeneration. This seems to me to be quite as great an act of faith as for Abraham to believe in the birth of a child by two parents who were both advanced in years. The case stands thus: here am I, dead by nature, dead in trespasses and sins. The deadness of Abraham and Sarah according to nature was not greater than the deadness of my soul to every good thing. Is it possible, then, that I should live unto God, that within this stony heart there should yet throb eternal life and

divine love, and that I should come to delight in God? Can it be that with such a depraved and deceitful heart as mine I should yet rise to fellowship with the holy God and should call him my Father and feel the spirit of adoption within my heart? Can I who now dread the Lord yet come to rejoice in him? "Oh," says the poor troubled sinner, "can I that have fought against the throne of God, I that even tried to deny his existence, ever come to be at perfect peace with him, so that he shall call me his friend and reveal his secret to me and listen to my voice in prayer? Is it possible?" The faith which saves the soul believes in the possibility of regeneration and sanctification, nay, more, it believes in Jesus and obtains for us power to become children of God and strength to conquer sin. This is believing God indeed.

Look this way yet again, for here is another difficulty. We know that we must persevere to the end, for only he that endureth to the end shall be saved. Does it not seem incredible that such feeble, fickle, foolish creatures as we are should continue in faith and the fear of God all our lives? Yet this we must do; and the faith which saves enables us to believe that we shall persevere, for it is persuaded that the Redeemer is able to keep that which we have committed unto him, that he will perfect that which concerneth us, that he will suffer none to pluck us out of his hand, and that having begun the good work in us he will carry it on. This is faith worthy of the father of the faithful.

Once again, let us behold another difficulty for faith. We believe according to God's promise that we shall one day be "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." I do believe that this head shall wear a crown of glory, and that this hand shall wave a palm branch. I am fully assured that he will one day sweetly say to me—

"Close thine eyes that thou may'st see
What I have in store for thee.
Lay thine arms of warfare down,
Fall that thou may'st win a crown."

We, all, who are believers in Jesus, shall one day be without fault before the throne of God; but how is this to be? Surely our confidence is that he who has promised it is able to perform it. This is the faith which finds its way to glory—the faith which expects to enter into the Redeemer's joy, because of the Redeemer's love and life. Brethren, in this matter we see the difficulties, but we do not consider them: we count them as less than nothing since omnipotence has come into the field. "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." We know that our Redeemer liveth, and that because he lives we shall also live, and be with him where he is.

At the end of the chapter we are told that *this saving faith rests in the power of God as manifested in Jesus*.—"If we believe in him who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Beloved, we believe that Jesus died, as certainly died as ever man died, and yet on the morning of the third day he rose again from the dead by divine power. It is not to us a thing incredible that God should raise the dead; we therefore believe that because God has raised the dead he hath raised us also from our death in sin, and that he will raise our bodies from the tomb after they shall have slept awhile in the

1. We believe also that our Lord Jesus died for our offences, and them away. Our faith builds upon the substitution of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, and it rests there with firm confidence. We believe also that he rose again because his substitution was accepted, and our offences were for ever put away,—rose again to prove that we are justified in him. This is where we stand then. I expect to be saved, not at all because of what I am, nor of what I can do, nor because of anything I ever shall be able to be or to do; but only because God has chosen to save those who believe in Jesus Christ through what the Lord Jesus has suffered in their stead. Because Jesus has risen to show that his suffering was accepted on the behalf of believers, there is rest and trust, and that is the way in which every believer is saved,—that way and no how else. Even as Abraham believed so do we. Here is the fact, it is of faith.

Now we come to the second point; and here we are to consider the FIRST REASON why God has chosen to make salvation by faith, *that it might be of grace.*"

Now, dear friends, the Lord might have willed to make the condition of salvation a mitigated form of works. If he had done so it would have been of grace, for it is a principle which I need not explain now, a fixed principle, that if the blessing be of grace it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; and if it be of works it is no more of grace, otherwise work is no more work. As water and oil will not mix, and as fire and water will not lie down side by side in quiet, neither will the principle of merit and the principle of free favour. Neither can we make a legal work to be a condition of a gracious blessing without at once introducing an alien element and really bringing the whole under the covenant of works, and so spoiling the whole plan of grace. Grace and faith are congruous, and will draw together in the same chariot, but grace and merit are contrary the one to the other and will go in opposite ways, and therefore God has not chosen to yoke them together. He will not build with incongruous materials, or daub with untempered mortar. He will not make an image partly of gold and partly of clay, nor weave a linsey-woolsey garment: his work is all of faith and all of grace.

Again, in Abraham's case, inasmuch as he received by faith the blessing which God promised him, it is very evident that it was of grace. I never heard any one ascribe Abraham's salvation to his merits, and Abraham was an eminently holy man. There are specks in his life, but in whose life will there not be found infirmities?—but yet he is one of the grandest characters of history. Still, no man thinks of Abraham as a self-justifying person, or as at all related to the Pharisee who said, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men." I never heard anybody hint that the great patriarch had whereof to glory before God. His name is not "the father of the innocent," but "the father of the faithful." When we read Abraham's life we see that God called him by a free act of sovereign grace, that God made a covenant with him as a father of grace, and that the promised child was born, not of the power of the flesh, but entirely according to promise. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life in the life of the patriarch, and it is illustrated in a thousand ways whenever we see his faith receiving the

promises. The holiness of Abraham, since it arose out of his faith, never leads us to ascribe his blessedness to anything but the grace of God.

Now, inasmuch as we are saved by faith, *every believer is made to as for himself that, in his own instance, it is by grace.* Believing is such a self-renunciating act that no man who looks for eternal life thereby ever talked about his own merits, except to count them but dross and dung. No, brethren, the child of the promise cannot live in the same house with the son of the bondwoman, when Isaac grows up Ishmael must depart: the principle of believing unto everlasting life will not endure a hint about human deservings. Those who believe in justification by faith are the only persons who can believe in salvation by grace. The believer may grow in grace till he becomes fully assured of his own salvation; yes, and he may become holiness unto the Lord in a very remarkable manner, being wholly consecrated to God in body, soul, and spirit, but you will never hear the believing man speak of his experience, or attainments, or achievements as a reason for glorying in himself, or as an argument for becoming more confident as to his safety. He dares not trust his works, or states of feeling, for he feels that by faith he stands. He cannot get away from simple faith, for the moment he attempts to do so he feels the ground going from under him, and he begins to sink into horrible confusion of spirit; therefore he returns unto his rest, and resolves to abide in faith in his risen Saviour, for there he abides in the grace of God.

Through the prominence given to faith, the truth of salvation by grace is so conspicuously revealed that *even the outside world are compelled to see it*, though the only result may be to make them cavil therewith. They charge us with preaching too much concerning grace, because they hear us magnifying and extolling the plan of salvation by faith, and they readily perceive that a gift promised to faith must be a boon of grace, and not a reward for service done. Only begin to preach salvation by works or ceremonies, and nobody will accuse you of saying too much of grace, but keep to faith and you are sure to keep to the preaching of grace.

Moreover, *faith never did clash with grace yet.* When the sinner comes and trusts to Christ, and Christ saith to him, "I forgive thee freely by my grace," faith says, "O Lord, that is what I want, and what I believe in; I ask thee to deal with me even so." "But if I give thee everlasting life it will not be because thou deservest it, but for mine own name's sake." Faith replies, "O Lord, that also is precisely as I desire; it is the sum and substance of my prayer." When faith grows strong and takes to pleading in prayer (and oh how mighty she is with God in supplication, moving his omnipotence to her mind), yet all her pleadings are based on grace, and none of them upon the merit of the creature. Never yet did faith borrow weapons from Mount Sinai, never once did she ask as though the favour were a debt, but she always holds to the promise of the gracious God, and expects all things from the faithfulness of her God.

Ay, and when faith grows strongest and attains to her highest stature, and is fullest of delight, so that she danceth for very joy, yet she never all her exultation boasts or exalts herself. Where is boasting, then?

It is excluded. By the law of works? nay, but by the law of faith. Faith and carnal boasting never yet walked together. If a man should boast of the strength of his faith, it would be clear evidence that he had none at all, or at least that he had for the time fallen into vainglorious presumption. Boasting? No, faith loves to lie low, and behave herself as a little child, and when she lifts herself up it is to exalt her Lord, and her Lord alone.

Faith, too, is well calculated to show forth the grace of God, because, *faith is the child of grace*. "Ah," says faith, "I have grasped the covenant, I have laid hold on the promises, I have seen Christ, I have gazed into heaven, I have enjoyed foretastes of eternal joys. But (says she) I am of the operation of God; I should never have existed if the Spirit of God had not created me." The believer knows that his faith is not a weed indigenous to the soil of his heart, but a rare plant, an exotic which has been planted there by divine wisdom, and he knows too that if the Lord does not nourish it his faith will die like a withered flower. He knows that his faith is a perpetual miracle; for it is begotten, sustained, and preserved by a power not less mighty than that which raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. If I met with an angel in a hovel I should know that he was not born there, but that he came from above; and so is it with faith, its heavenly descent is manifest to all. Faith, then, tracing her very existence to grace, never can be anything but the friend, the vindicator, the advocate, and the glorifier of the grace of God: therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace.

III. Now, thirdly, there is A FURTHER REASON for faith and grace being the Lord's chosen method of salvation,—"*To the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed.*" Look at this, dear friends, very carefully. Salvation was made to be of faith, and not of works, that the promise might be sure to all the seed, for first, *it could not have been sure to us Gentiles by the law*, because in a certain sense we were not under the law of Moses at all. Turn to the text and you find that it runs thus: "Sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." That is to say, the Jew receiving the seal of circumcision and coming under the ceremonial law, eating its passover, and presenting its sacrifices, might possibly have been reached by a legal method, but we who are Gentiles would have been altogether shut out. As to the covenant according to the flesh, we are aliens and have never come under its bonds, or participated in its privileges, therefore grace chooses to bless us by faith in order that the Gentile may partake of the blessing of the covenant as well as the Jew.

But there is a still wider reason: it is of faith, because *the other method has failed already in every case*. We have all broken the law already, and so have put ourselves beyond the power of ever receiving blessing as a reward of merit. Failure at the outset has ruined our future prospects, and henceforth by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. What remaineth, then, if we are to be saved at all, but that it should be of faith? This door alone is open, let us bless God that no man can shut it.

Again, it is of faith that it *might be sure*. Now, under the system of works nothing is sure. Suppose, my dear brethren, you were under a

covenant of salvation by works, and you had fulfilled those works up till now, yet you would not be sure. Are you seventy years of age, and have you kept your standing till now? Well, you have done a great deal more than father Adam did, for though he was a perfect man without any natural corruption, I do not suppose that he kept his first estate for a day. But after all you have done for these long years you may lose everything before you have finished your next meal. If your standing depends upon your own works you are not safe, and can never be safe till you are out of this present life, for you might sin, and that one offence against the conditions would destroy the covenant. "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall die thereby." But see the excellence of salvation by grace, for when you reach the ground of faith in the promises you are upon *terra sancta*, and your soul is no longer in jeopardy. Here is a sure foundation, for the divine promise cannot fail. If my salvation depends upon the Lord, and is received by me on the ground that the Lord hath decreed it, promised it in covenant, and ensured it to me by the blood of Jesus Christ, then it is so mine that neither life nor death nor Satan nor the world shall ever rob me of it. If I live to the age of Methuselah my faith will have the same promises to rest upon, and clinging there she will defy the lapse of years to change her immutable security. The promise would not be sure to one of the seed by any other means than that of grace through faith, but now it is sure to all.

Moreover, if the promise had been made to works there are some of the seed to whom most evidently it never could come. One of the seed of Abraham hung dying upon a cross, and within an hour or two his bones were broken that he might the more quickly die and be buried. Now, if salvation to that poor dying thief must come by works, how can he be saved? His hands and feet are fastened up and he is in the very article of death, what can he do? The promise would not have been sure to him, my brethren, if there had been any active condition; but he believed, cast a saving eye upon the Lord Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me," and the promise was most sure to him, for the answer was—"To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Many a chosen one of God is brought into such a condition that nothing is possible to him except faith, but grace has made the act of believing divinely possible. Well was it for those bitten by serpents that all that was asked of them was a look, for this was possible even when the hot venom made the blood to boil and scalded all the frame with fever. Faith is possible to the blind, the lame, the deaf, the dumb; faith is possible to the almost idiot, the desponding and the guilty; faith can be possessed by babes and by the extremely aged, by the illiterate as well as by the instructed; it is well chosen as the cup to convey the living water, for it is not too heavy for the weak, nor too huge for the little, nor too small for the full-grown.

Now, brothers and sisters, I have done when I have said just this. I will ask you who have believed in Christ one question,—you who are resting in the promise of God, you who are depending upon the finished work of him who was delivered for your offences—how do you feel? Are you rejoicing in your unquestionable safety? As I have turned this matter over, and thought upon it, my soul has dwelt

a perfect peace. I cannot conceive anything that God himself could give to the believer which would make him more safe than the work of Christ has made him. God cannot lie, are you not sure of this? He must keep his promise, are you not certain of this? What more do you want? As a little child believes its father's word without any question, even so would we rest on the bare, naked promise of Jehovah, and in so doing we become conscious of a peace that passeth all understanding, which keeps your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. I dare not say otherwise, nor be silent, for I am conscious of being able to say, "Therefore being justified by faith, I have peace with God." In that peace of the soul much love springs up, and inward unity to God and conformity to Christ. Faith believes her God and trusts him for time and eternity, for little things and great things, for body and for soul, and this leads on to still higher results. O blessed God, what a union of desire, and heart, and aim exists between thee and the soul that trusts thee! How are we brought into harmony with thy mind and purposes! How is our heart made to delight in thee! How completely is our soul "bound up in the bundle of life with the soul of the Lord our God"! We grow up into him in all things who is our Head, our life, our all.

I charge you, dear children of God, "as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in him." Live in his peace, and abound in it more and more; do not be afraid of being too peaceful, "rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." When you have to condemn yourself for shortcomings, yet do not question the promise of the Lord. When sin overcomes you, confess the fault, but do not doubt the pardon which Jesus still gives you. When sharp temptations and severe trials rise from divers quarters do not suffer them to carry you by storm; let not the stronghold and castle of your spirit be captured—"let not your heart be troubled." Stagger not at the promise through unbelief, but hold to it whether you walk in the sunshine or in Egyptian darkness. That which the Lord has promised he is able also to perform, do not doubt it. Lean hard on the faithful promise, and when you feel sad at heart lean harder and harder still, for "faithful is he that hath promised, who also will do it."

Last of all, you sinners here this morning, who have heard all about his salvation by trusting; I charge you do not rest till you have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, and rested in the great promises of God. Here is one: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities will I remember no more for ever." Here is another which is very cheering: "Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Call upon him in prayer, and then say, "Lord, I have called, and thou hast said I shall be saved." Here is another gracious word: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Attend thou to these two commands, and then say, "Lord, I have thy word for it that I shall be saved, and I hold thee to it." Believe God, sinner. Oh that he would give thee grace this morning by his Holy Spirit to say, "How can I do otherwise than believe him? I dare not doubt him." O poor tried soul, believe in Jesus so as to trust thy guilty soul with him. The more guilty thou feelest thyself to be the more is it in thy power to glorify God, by believing that he

can forgive and renew such a guilty one as thou art. If thou hast buried like a fossil in the lowest stratum of sin, yet he can quarry for thee and fetch thee up out of the horrible pit, and make thy dry, petrified heart to live. Believest thou this? "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Trust the promise that he makes to every believer that he will save him, and hold thou to it, for it is not a vain thing, it is thy life. "But what if I obtain no joy or peace?" Believe the promise still, and joy and peace will come. "But what if I see no signs?" Ask for no signs, be willing to trust God's word without any other guarantee but his truthful character, and thou wilt thus give him glory. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Believe that Jehovah cannot lie, and as he has promised to forgive all who believe in Jesus, hang on to that word and thou shalt be saved. Sinners, I have set before you the way of salvation as simply as I can, will you have it or not? May the Spirit of God sweetly lead you to say, "Have it, ay, that I will." Then go in peace, and rejoice henceforth and for ever. God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Colossians ii.

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THE GREAT HOUSE AND THE VESSELS IN IT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 8TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."—2 Timothy, ii. 20, 21.

ONE of the most serious calamities which can befall a church is to have her own ministers teaching heresy: yet this is no new thing, it has happened from the beginning. Paul and Peter and James and John in their epistles had to speak of seducers in the churches, even in those primitive days, and ever since then there have arisen in the very midst of the house of God those who have subverted the faith of many, and led them away from the fundamental truths into errors of their own inventing. The apostle compares this to a gangrene, which is one of the most dangerous and deadly mischiefs which can occur to the body. It is within the body, it eats into the flesh deeper and deeper, festering and putrefying, and if it be not stopped it will continue its ravages till life is extinguished by "black mortification." False doctrine and an unchristian spirit in the midst of the church itself must be regarded as such a gangrene, a silent wolf ravenously gnawing at the heart, the vulture of Prometheus devouring the vitals: no external opposition is one-half so much to be dreaded. Yet here is our comfort when distressed at the evils of the present age, among which this is one of the chief, that the truth abides for ever the same, "The foundation of God standeth sure." There is no moving that. Whether ten thousand oppose it or promulgate it, the truth is still the same in every jot and tittle; even as the sun shineth evermore, as well when clouds conceal its brightness as when from a clear sky it pours abroad a flood of glory. The lovers of profane and vain babblings have not taken away from us, nor can they take from us, the eternal verities: the Lord liveth, though they have said, "There is no God." The precious blood of Jesus has not lost its efficacy, though divines have beclouded the atonement; the Spirit of God is not less

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mighty to quicken and to console though men have denied his personality; the resurrection is as sure as if Hymeneus and Philetas had never said that it is passed already; and the eternal covenant of grace abides for ever unbroken though Pharisees and Sadducees unite to revile it. The foundation of God standeth sure, and moreover the foundation of the church remains sure also, for, blessed be God, "the Lord knoweth them that are his." All that God has built upon the foundation which he himself has laid keeps its place, not one living stone that he ever laid upon the foundation has been lifted from its resting place. Earthquakes of error may test the stability of the building and cause great searching of heart, but sooner shall the mountains which are round about Jerusalem start from their seats than the work or word of the Lord be frustrated. The things which cannot be shaken remain unaltered in the very worst times.

"After all," says the apostle in effect, though in fewer words, "it is not such a very great wonder that there should be persons in the church who are not of the sterling metal of sincerity, nor of the gold and silver of truth, which endures the fire. You must not look at Hymeneus and Philetas as if they were prodigies, there have been many like them and there will be many more; these ill weeds grow apace, in all ages they multiply and increase." Where, dear brethren, beneath the skies shall we find absolute purity in any community? The very first family had a Cain in it, and there was a wicked Ham even in the select few within the ark. In the household of the father of the faithful there was an Ishmael; Isaac, with all his quiet walk with God, must be troubled with an Esau, and ye know how in the house of Jacob there were many sons that walked not as they should. When the church of God was in the wilderness and had a barrier of desert between it and the outer world, yet ye know how Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were there, beside many other troublers in Israel; yea, even amidst the most select part of the visible church of God, in the priesthood, there were found those that dishonoured it. Nadab and Abihu were slain with fire before the Lord; and Hophni and Phineas died in battle, because they had made themselves vile, though God's anointed priests. Even when our divine Master had formed for himself

"A little garden, walled around,
Chosen, and made peculiar ground,"

in which there were but twelve choice trees, yet one of them bore evil fruit. "I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." In the great field which Christ has sown, tares will spring up among the wheat, for the enemy takes pains to sow them; neither is it possible for us to root them up. In the king's garden briars will grow, thorns also and thistles will the most sacred soil yield to us. Even the lilies of Christ grow among thorns. You cannot keep the best of churches altogether pure, for though the Lord himself has prepared a vineyard, and made a winepress, and built a wall about it, yet the foxes come and spoil the vines; and though our great Lord has an orchard which yieldeth rare fruit, yet when he cometh to visit it he finds a barren fig tree, digged about and dunged it is true, but barren still. Look to Christ's fold on earth, and behold there are wolves in sheep's clothing there; look to the

net which his servants draw to shore, and there are both good and bad fish therein. Yea, lift your eyes even to the skies, and though there be myriads of stars, yet ye shall mark wandering stars among them, and meteors which are and are not, and are quenched in the blackness of darkness for ever. Until we shall come to the heaven of the Most High we must expect to find chaff mixed with the wheat, dross with the gold, goats with the sheep, and dead flies with the ointment; only let us see to it that we be not of that ill character, but be precious in the sight of the Lord.

Coming to the text, the apostle suggests the encouragement I have already given, under a certain metaphor. He says that in a great house there will naturally be varieties of furniture, and there will be vessels and utensils of many kinds; some of them will be of wood, and of earthenware, for meaner purposes; and others of gold and silver, for state occasions, when the honour and glory of the great proprietor are to be displayed. There are vessels of precious metal in a great house, and these are its honour, decking the tables on high festivals when the Master is at home; but there are others of baser stuff, kept in the back-ground, never displayed at times of rejoicing, but meant for common drudgery. There are cups and flagons of solid silver prized as perpetual heirlooms of the family, which are carefully preserved, and trenchers and pots which are soon worn out and are only of temporary use, many sets of them being broken up in the lifetime of a family. The like is true in the church of God, which being in the world has its common side and its common vessels, but being also a heavenly house has also its nobler furniture, far more precious than gold which perisheth though it be tried with fire.

For our instruction, may the Holy Spirit help us while we look first at *the great house*; secondly, at *the meaner vessels*, peeping into the scullery; thirdly, at the *nobler vessels*, going into the plate chamber to look at the silver and gold; and then, fourthly, before we leave the house, let us ask for an interview with *the Master himself*.

I. First, let us consider THE GREAT HOUSE.

The apostle compares the church to a great house. We feel sure he is not speaking of the world; it did not occur to him to speak about the world, and it would have been altogether superfluous to tell us that in the world there are all sorts of people,—everybody knows that. The church is a great house *belonging to a great personage*, for the church is the house of God, according to the promise—"I will dwell in them, and walk in them." The church is the temple in which the Lord is worshipped, the palace in which he rules; it is his castle, and place of defence for his truth, the armoury out of which he supplies his people with weapons. The church is God's mansion house in which he abides—"This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell for I have desired it." There it is that he rests in his love, and in infinite condescension manifests himself as he doth not unto the world. King Solomon built for himself a house in the forest of Lebanon, and behold, the Lord hath of living stones builded for himself a far more glorious house wherein he may abide. It is a great house because it is the house of the great God. Who can be so great as he?

It is a great house because *planned and designed upon a great scale*.

I fear that some who live in the house have no idea how great it is. They have a very faint notion of its length and breadth. The great thoughts of God are far beyond their most elevated conceptions, so that he might say to them as he has said to others, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord." The palace of the King of kings is "exceeding magnificent," and its spaciousness far excelleth all the abodes of earthly princes. We read of the golden palace of Nero, that it reached from hill to hill, and enclosed lakes and stream and gardens beneath its wondrous roof; but behold, the Lord has stretched the line of his electing grace over nations and kindreds even to the ends of the earth: his house taketh in a mighty sweep of humanity. Many are the rooms in the house, and there are dwellers in one room who have never yet seen any part of the great house but the little chamber in which they were born, never walked through the marvellous corridors, or moved in the vast halls which God hath builded with cedar pillars and cedar beams, and carved work of heavenly workmanship. Some good men hardly care to see the long rows of polished columns, quarried by grace from the rough mass of nature, which now shine resplendent as monuments of divine love and wisdom. Colossal is the plan of the Eternal, the church of God is worthy of the infinite mind. Angels and principalities delight to study the stupendous plan, and well they may: as the great Architect unrolls his drawings piece by piece to let them see the various sections of the complete design, they are struck with admiration, and exclaim, "Oh the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God." The church is no narrow cottage wherein a few may luxuriate in bigotry, but it is a great house, worthy of the infinite heart of Jehovah, worthy of the blood of Jesus, the incarnate God, and worthy of the power of the ever-blessed Spirit.

It is a great house because *it has been erected at great cost, and with great labour.* The cost of this mansion who can tell? It is a price beyond price, for God has given his only-begotten Son—he had but one, and heaven could not match him—that he might redeem unto himself a people who should be his dwelling-place for ever. "Solomon's temple, now that they have laid bare a part of the foundations, even though it be in utter ruin, astonishes all beholders, as they mark the enormous size and accurate adjustment of the stones; what must it have been in its glory? What cost was lavished on that glorious house. But think of the labour and the skill, the divine art and engineering with which Jehovah has hewn out of the rock of sinful nature the stones with which he builds up his spiritual house. What energy has the Holy Spirit displayed! What resurrection power! Harder than any granite we were by nature, yet has he cut us away from the rock of which we formed a part, and fashioned and squared us, and made us to be builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit. Tell it to the praise of the glory of his grace, that the Lord's omnipotent power and boundless wealth of love are revealed in his church. When our eyes shall see the church of God at last in all her beauty descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, and her light like unto a stone most precious, even like unto a jasper stone; when we shall see that the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal; when we shall see its deep foundations laid in the eternal

purpose, and its walls upbuilt with lofty pinnacles of glory, high as the divine person of her Lord; and when we shall mark its wondrous compass, broad enough to hold the glory and honour of the nations,—then shall we shout for joy as we behold the riches and the power and the splendour of the great King of kings, who has builded for himself this great house.

It is a great house, again, because *its household arrangements are conducted on a great scale*. You know the country people, when there is some rich lord living in the village, speak always of his mansion as “the great house.” It is the great house for which those bullocks are being fattened, and those sheep and lambs will be consumed at the great house, for there are many in the family, and none are allowed to want. Solomon kept a great house. When you read the account of the daily provision for his table you see that it was a great house indeed, a vast and truly royal establishment. Ay, but neither for quality nor quantity could Solomon’s palace match with the great house of God in its plenty. Speak of fine flour—behold, he has given us angels’ food: speak of royal dainties—behold, the Lord hath given us fat things full of marrow, wines on the lees well refined. What a perpetual feast doth the Lord Jesus keep up for all his followers. If any of them hunger it is not because their rations are stinted; if there be any complaining it is not because the Master’s oxen and fatlings are not freely provided. Ah, no; to every man there is a good piece of flesh and a flagon of wine dealt out, even as David dealt it out in the day when he removed the ark unto the hill of Zion. Glory be to God, he hath said, “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” In this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest, and he will make unto all nations a feast of fat things. Behold, his oxen and fatlings are killed, all things are ready. It is a great house, where great sinners are fed on great dainties, and filled with the great goodness of the Lord.

It is a great house *for the number of its inhabitants*. How many have lived beneath that roof-tree for ages. “Lord,” say they like a great host, “thou hast been our dwelling place throughout all generations.” God is the home of his people, and his church is the home of God; and what multitudes are dwelling there now. Not only the companies that we know of, with whom it is our delight to meet for solemn worship, but all over the world the Lord hath a people who dwell in the midst of his church; and, though men have disfigured their Master’s house by chalking up odd signs over some of the rooms, and calling them by other names than those of the owner, yet the Lord’s people are all one church, and to whatever part or party they may seem to belong, if Christ is in them they belong to him of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, and they make up but one spiritual house. What a swarm there is of the Lord’s children, and yet not one of the family remains unfed. The church is a great house wherein thousands dwell, yea, a number that no man can number.

Once more, it is a great house, *because of its importance*. People speak of “the great house” in our remoter counties because to the whole neighbourhood it bears a special relationship, being connected with some of its most vital interests: county politics and police, dignity and wealth find their centre at “the great house.” The church is a

great house because it is God's hospice, where he distributes bread and wine to refresh the weary, and entertains wayfarers that else had been lost in the storm. It is God's hospital, into which he takes the sick, and there he nourishes them till they renew their youth like the eagle's. It is God's great *pharos* with its lantern flashing forth a directing ray so that wanderers far away may be directed to the haven of peace. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." It is the seat of God's magistracy, for there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Behold, the Lord hath set his King upon his holy hill of Zion, and thence shall the power of his sceptre go forth to the ends of the earth. The great house of the church is the university for teaching all nations, the library wherein the sacred oracles are preserved, the treasury wherein the truth is deposited, and the registry of new-born heirs of heaven. It is important to heaven as well as to earth, for its topmost towers reach into glory, and there is in it a ladder the foot whereof doth rest on earth, but the top thereof doth reach to heaven, up and down which the angels come and go continually. Said I not well that the apostle had wisely chosen the figure when he called the church a great house?

II. We will now go inside the great house, and we at once observe that it is well furnished. Our text, however, invites us to note that it contains a number of *MEANER VESSELS*, articles of the coarser kind for ordinary and common uses. Here are trenchers and buckets of wood, and pitchers and pots and divers vessels of coarse pottery. Some have thought that this figure of vessels to dishonour relates to Christians of a lower grade, persons of small grace and of less sanctified conversation. Now, although believers may from some points of view be comparable to earthen vessels, yet I dare not look upon any child of God, however low in grace, as a vessel to dishonour. Moreover, the word "*these*" refers to the earthen and wooden vessels, and surely they cannot represent saints, or we should never be told to purge ourselves from them. If a man be God's child, into whatever state and condition he may fall, it is our business to look after him and endeavour to restore him, remembering ourselves also, lest we also be tempted; but it cannot be right to purge ourselves from even the least of our believing brethren. Besides, that is not the run of the chapter at all. The real meaning is that in the church of God there are unworthy persons serving inferior and temporary purposes, who are *vessels to dishonour*. They are in the church, but they are like vessels of wood and vessels of earth, they are not the treasure of the mansion, they are not brought out on state occasions, and are not set much store by, for they are not "precious in the sight of the Lord." The apostle does not tell us how they came there, for it was not his intent to do so, and no parable or metaphor could teach everything; neither will I stay to describe how some professors have come into the church of God, some by distinct falsehood and by making professions which they knew were untrue, others through ignorance, and others again by being self-deceived, and carried away with excitement. The parable does not say how they got there, but there they are, and yet they are only vessels of wood and vessels of earth. It is no credit to them that they are where they are, for they are not vessels to honour though in an honourable place. It is

no honour to any man to be a member of a Christian church if he be in himself intrinsically worthless : though they make a minister of him, or elect him deacon, it is no honour to him to be in office if the metal he is made of does not fit him for so honourable a purpose. He is an intruder in an honourable position, and it is a dishonour to him to be where he is. It is no honour to a weed to grow in the best part of the garden, no honour to a barren figtree to cumber the finest ground in the vineyard. Ah, dear friend, if you are in the church of God, but not truly one of the Lord's people, it is a dishonourable thing of you to have come there, and it is equally dishonourable for you to remain there without fulfilling that great requisite which is demanded of every one who names the name of Jesus, that he depart from all iniquity.

The vessels in the great house are, however, of *some use*, even though they are made of wood and earth ; and so there are persons in the church of God whom the Lord Jesus will not own as his treasure, but he nevertheless turns them to some temporary purpose. Some are useful as the scaffold to a house, or the dogshores to a ship, or the hedges to a field. I believe that some unworthy members of the church are useful in the way of watch dogs to keep others awake, or lancets to let blood, or burdens to try strength. Some quarrelsome members of the church help to scour the other vessels, lest they should rust through being peaceful. The church is made up of men who are yet in the body, and it has to deal with the outside world, and sometimes the worldly men who are in her serve some purpose in connection with this her lowest need. Judas made a good treasurer, for his economy saved more than he stole. Joab was a good warrior for David, though he was by no means a saint. False professors do not make the gospel untrue, and sometimes when they have spoken it God has blessed it. You may see, if you go down the Kennington-park-road to-day, a row of young trees planted by the road : how are they kept up while yet they are slender ? Why, small posts of dead timber hold them up ; and even so a dead Sunday-school teacher may yet be useful to a really Christian child, and a dead deacon may be the financial support of a living church. Ay, and there are dead preachers, too, who nevertheless serve to fill up a space, but what vessels to dishonour they are. It is a dreadful thing, however, for those who are like the posts I just now mentioned, because the quicker the young tree grows the sooner will the post be taken away, being no participant in the life which it helped to support. You see, then, that the base professors who get into the church are turned to some account by our great Master ; the servants of the great house can use the wooden ware and the earthenware for awhile for rough every-day purposes, even as mere formalists can be employed in some scullery work or another.

There is one thing noticeable, viz., that the wooden and earthen vessels are *not for the Master's use*. When he holds high festival his cups are all of precious metal. "All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold." Would you have the King of kings set an earthen pot upon his royal table ? Shall the guests at his table eat from wooden bowls ? So false professors are only useful to the servants, not to the Master ; they serve base purposes, and are not to be seen on those great days when he manifests his glory. The Great Master overrules all

things, being the master of the servants, and so far that which answers the purpose of his servants is serviceable to him, but personally between the King at his table and the wooden vessel there is no congruity: it would be an insult to hand him wine in any but a sumptuous cup of precious metal, or to bring him butter in any but a lordly dish. How sad it is that many Christians are useful to the church in various ways, but as for personal service rendered to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in that they have no share whatever and never can have till grace changes them from wood to silver, or from earth to gold.

Note that in these vessels of which the apostle speaks *the substance is base*. They are wood, or they are earth, nothing more. So are we all by nature of base material, and grace must make us into silver or into golden vessels, or the Master cannot himself use us, nor can our use in the church ever be to honour. The wooden vessels in the church are very easily hacked and carved and spoiled; if a man be inclined to mischief he can put his knife to them and can cut great notches in them, ruin their character, and render them worthless. Canning teachers can soon take away from merely nominal Christians what they professed to believe, for they are very readily cut and hacked by those who play at such games. As for the earthen vessels, how soon they are broken. Outside of any great house there are the remains of many broken pots, which fell to the ground and went to pieces; and, I am sorry to say, we also can find enough of such relics to sadden us all. There were some in this house once who were comely to look upon, but there came a temptation and brushed them from the table; and they were shivered in a moment. Others of precious metal have endured far more shocks and tests of a severer kind, but these being only of earth were broken at once. Heaps of crockery accumulate outside every great house, and certainly outside the great house of Christ.

These vessels unto dishonour, though turned to some account, *require a great deal of care on the part of the servants*. When our fathers used to eat from wooden trenchers, the time the good wives used to spend in scalding and cleaning to keep them at all sweet to eat upon was something terrible, and there are members of the church who take a world of time from pastors and elders to keep them at all decent: we are continually trying to set them right, or keep them right, in the common relationships of life. There are quarrels in their families which must be settled lest they become scandals, and these occupy the careful thought of their fellow Christians who have to watch for their good; or they get lax in their doctrines, or foolish in their habits, or loose in their business transactions, and we have to be scouring and cleaning them times without number. Certain sorts of earthen vessels you have to be very particular in handling. Like egg-shell china, you may hardly look at them. Thank God I have not many in this church, perhaps none of that sort, as far as *my* handling is concerned, but other people's touches, though quite as wise, are not so welcome. Certain earthen vessels get dreadfully chipped unless they have dainty handling. If a brother does not take his hat off to them in very lowly style, and behave very reverently, they are ready to take offence. They feel themselves hurt and slighted when no such thing was intended; they stand upon their dignity and expect the fullest recognition

of it. These are real earthen pots, very apt to be chipped, perhaps a little cracked already, and needing a deal of care and trouble on the part of the Lord's servants, lest they should go to pieces and spill everything that is put into them.

There are such in all great houses, and in the Master's great house there are I fear not a few. They are useful up to a certain point, but they bring no honour to the house, because there are plenty as good as they in other houses, every cottage can have common earthen pitchers in it. They are vessels in which is no pleasure, they are not peculiar, or precious; nobody ever sounds abroad the Master's fame because he has so many thousands of wooden bowls or earthen pots. No, the king's honour comes from the plate, the gold and silver vessels, the peculiar treasure of kings. People speak about these rich goods and say, "You should see the sideboards loaded down with the massive services of gold and silver; you should see how the tables groan beneath the splendour of the royal feast when the king brings forth his treasures." True Christians are the glory of Christ, but false professors at their very best are unto dishonour. Better the smallest silver vessel than the largest earthen one; better the least of all the saints than the greatest of vain professors. So much upon the vessels to dishonour.

III. We are now going into the treasury, or plate room, and will think of THE NOBLER VESSELS.

These are, first of all, of *solid metal*, vessels of silver and vessels of gold. They are not all equally valuable, but they are all precious. Here is weight for you; here is something that is worth treasuring, something which will last for ages, and at any time will endure the fire. Now, in real Christians, those who really love the Lord, there is something substantial and weighty, and when you get hold of them you know the difference between them and the wooden professor. Even those who do not like them—strange taste that which does not appreciate silver and gold—are nevertheless compelled to say, "That is a genuine article, worth a great deal, weighty and substantial." Now, we shall none of us ever be vessels of silver and gold unless the Lord make us so by divine grace. Vessels of earth are things of nature, any potter can make them; vessels of wood are common enough, the cooper soon produces a pail; but a vessel of silver or of gold is a rarer thing; it costs mining and searching, furnace work and fashioning, toil and skill. On each vessel unto honour Jesus himself has put his hand to mould and fashion it, and to cause it to be "prepared unto glory." Did you ever hear how vessels come to be golden? Listen to this, and you shall know. One very dear to me has put the story into rhythm.

"Oh that I were a cup, a golden cup
Meest for the Master's use!
Brimming and trembling with that draught of joy
(The love of his belov'd and purchas'd ones)
Which fills his heart with gladness."

* * * * *
So spake a poor, vile, broken, earthy thing,
A worthless castaway.
The Master heard, and when he passed that way
He stoop'd and touch'd it with his wounded hand—
When lo! its baseness vanish'd, and instead

There stood a *golden chalice* wondrous fair,
 And overflowing with deep love for him.
 He raised it to his gracious lips, and quaffed
 "The wine that maketh glad the heart of God,"
 Then took the cup to heaven.

On the vessels to honour you can see *the hall mark*. What is the hall mark which denotes the purity of the Lord's golden vessels? Well, he has only one stamp for everything. When he laid the foundation what was the seal he put upon it? "The Lord knoweth them that are his, and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity." That was God's seal, the impress of the great King upon the foundation-stone. Do we find it here? Yes, we do. "If a man, therefore, purge himself from these he shall be a vessel unto honour." You see that the man who is the golden or silver vessel departs from all iniquity, and that is the token of his genuine character. The man who is truly the Lord's seeks to be cleansed not only from the open sin of the world, but from the common sin of professing Christians; he labours to be purged from that which the wooden vessel and the earthen vessel would delight in; he wants to be pure within and without, he desires perfection, he labours daily to conquer every sin, and strives with all his might to serve his Lord. He is not content to have a fair appearance, as wood and earth may have—he wishes to be solid, substantial metal, purged and purified to the utmost possible degree, and fit for the highest purposes. Now, this seeking after purity is the hall mark of the King's vessels of gold and silver.

Notice, however, that *they are purged*, for the Lord will not use filthy vessels be they what they may. He will only use those that are clean, and he would have his true people purged, as I have said before, not only from gross sin, but from doctrinal error, and from association with the perverse minded. We are to be purged from Hymeneus and Philetus, and from the vain babblings of which the apostle has been speaking in the previous part of the chapter. I fear that Christian men do a great deal of mischief by their complicity with those who are teaching what is downright falsehood. If we are to serve the Lord in the matter of advancing his truth we must be true to truth ourselves; but if we join hand in hand with others, and so form a confederacy when the very pillars of the temple are being pulled down by rude hands, it may be we shall be partakers of other men's sin. We must be clean-handed in this matter.

And then notice that *these gold and silver vessels are reserved* as well as purged. They are made meet for the Master's use. Nobody is to drink out of them but the king himself. This is the blessedness of the child of God when he comes to be what he should be, that he can sing as we did just now,

"I am thine, and thine alone,
 This I gladly, fully own;
 And, in all my works and ways,
 Only now would seek thy praise."

As Joseph had a cup out of which he alone drank, so the Lord takes his people to be his peculiar treasure, vessels for his personal use. Brethren, I count it an honour to be useful to the meanest child of God,

but I confess that the honour lies mainly in the fact that I am thereby serving the Master himself. Oh, to be used by God! This is to answer the end of our being. If you can feel that *God* has used you then may you rejoice indeed. There are some Christians whom the Lord cannot much use because, first of all, they are not cleansed from selfishness, they have an eye to their own honour or aggrandisement. The Lord will not be in complicity with selfish aims. Some men are self-confident: there is too much of the "I" about them, and the Master will not use them. He will have our weakness, but not our strength, and if we are great **somebodies** he will pass us by and take some little nobody and make use of him. The Lord cannot use some men because they are too apt to be proud; if he were to give them a little success it would be dangerous to their Christian existence; their poor brain would begin to swim, and they would think the Lord could hardly do without them; indeed, when they meet with a little encouragement they swell into such wonderful people that they expect everybody to fall down and worship them. God will not use them, neither will he set upon his table vessels which are in any way defiled. There must be purity, and a man may work his heart out in the ministry or the Sunday-school, but if he is practising some secret sin he cannot prosper; it is not possible that God should honour him. There may be a measure of apparent success for a time, and divine sovereignty may use the truth itself despite the man, but the man himself will not be useful to the Master. Littleness of grace and contentedness with that spiritual poverty also puts many a man aside. We must be full if God is to pour out of us to the thirsty, we must be full of his light if we are to illuminate the darkness of others: we cannot reveal to the world what the Lord has not revealed to us.

Oh, for a holy character and holy communion with God; then we shall be golden vessels fit for the Master's use, and so, according to the text, we shall be *ready for every good work*, ready for the work when it comes, and ready at the work when it has come, because completely consecrated to God and subject to his hand. In this readiness for whatever comes we shall be honoured. Men may despise us, as they will, but what matters it if God honours us? This height of grace may cost us a sharp experience, but must not gold be tried with fire? As thieves are most anxious to steal, not the pots and wooden vessels, but the gold and the silver, so we may expect to be exposed to greater temptations and greater persecutions than others. More grace involves more trials, but then we shall have the delight of glorifying God more. Oh, to be vessels unto honour! Beloved members of this church, do aspire to this. You have given in your names as Christians, you have been baptized into the sacred name of the divine Trinity, you have borne hitherto a consistent moral character, but oh, see to it that the inner substance is the real metal, the gold and silver. Do see to it that you are reserved for the Lord's own special use. Be as consecrated to him as were the bowls before the altar. Never let the world drink out of you, as Belshazzar did out of the vessels taken at Jerusalem. May the Lord grant that you may never be defiled, but may be kept by his grace pure and consecrated to him.

IV. Fourthly, for a moment we must speak about THE MASTER.

He is introduced here, you see, as having certain vessels meet for his

use, and this shows that he is in the house. There would be no need to reserve vessels for his use if he were not there, but he is in the midst of his church by his indwelling Spirit. How this ought to make us wish to be purged, sanctified, and ready for him. Your Master is not far away. His presence in the church is promised: "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." What manner of persons, therefore, ought you to be?

Secondly, the Master knows all about the house, and knows the quality of all the vessels. There is no deceiving him with the wooden trencher, he knows it is not gold: and as for that earthen cup, though it may be gilt all over, he knows it is not gold. He reads the heart of everyone here present; wood or earth, silver or gold, the Master understands us.

And then reflect that the Master will use us all as far as we are fit to be used. We are in God's house, and if we are wood, he will put us to wooden use. There are many wooden preachers. If we are earth and earthly minded he may put us to earthly uses, as he did Judas, who carried the bag, but had no grace. If you are silver he will give you silver use, and if you are gold he will give you golden service, in which you shall be happy, and honoured, and blessed.

What comes of this, then, lastly? Why, brethren, let us bestir ourselves that we be purged, for the text says, "If a man therefore purge himself." It throws this business upon each one of us personally,—a man must purge himself from ill company; but when we have confessed the responsibility let us turn to God in prayer, and feel that thorough purging is a work which we cannot achieve, and therefore we cry, "Cleanse me, O God, sanctify me; make me meet for thy service, and prepared to every good work."

Beloved, finish with earnest prayer. Pray God that ye may not be hypocrites: beseech the Lord to search you and try you, that you be not found deceivers, and when you are sure that you are his, then ask him to make you not merely silver, for it is very apt to tarnish, but even the precious gold, which when exposed to the worst influences scarcely shows a trace of dulness. Pure unalloyed gold may we be, and then may the Master both in secret and public use us to his own joy. May he refresh himself with our love and faith, yea, may his joy be fulfilled in us, that our joy may be full. God grant it may be so, for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Timothy ii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—910, 653, 663.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FAITH PURIFYING THE HEART.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 15TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAOLE, NEWINGTON.

"Purifying their hearts by faith."—Acts xv. 9.

THE Jewish or Pharisaic party violently opposed the gospel from without. Wherever the apostles went, the Jews who believed not, being moved with envy, stirred up the people against them. They could not endure to hear of the salvation of the Gentiles by grace through faith: it grated on their ear, for they thought that this doctrine was contrary to the law of Moses in which they boasted. They were children of the bondwoman, under the old covenant of works, and they could not endure that the children of the promise should come to the inheritance. They struggled and rebelled against the gospel of salvation by grace, for it went against their natural pride and their national exclusiveness. Yea, and even when any of them, as blessed be the grace of God was the case, became converted, the old man was still within them, and the spirit of bondage was still apt to assert itself. Those who had been of the sect of the Pharisees brought a good share of Pharisaic tendencies with them into the church, and these were dangerous to the young kingdom of Christ. I scarcely know whether legal principles were not able to do more mischief inside the church by perverting pure doctrine than they could do outside the church by exciting persecution. One can hardly imagine how the gospel could have escaped being overlaid and smothered by Judaism, like a babe by its mother, had it not been for the preserving grace of God, and the indwelling Spirit within the church of God. Ye know, brethren, how we mourn at this day that certain who claim to be Christians are labouring most zealously to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. They invent pompous ceremonies, observe days and months, and are bound by rubrics and regulations, all of which are an idle and needless servitude to outward forms. Certain others would bind us with creeds and ordinances not plainly taught in the word of

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God, nor agreeable thereto, of which Peter and John knew nothing whatever, having no force but that which comes of human authority. The old Pharisaic spirit is a great forger of bonds and builder of prisons, it would subject us to ordinances of "Touch not, taste not, handle not," and fetter us with rules of many sorts: for it cannot understand the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. It teacheth this and it teacheth that, whereof the apostles would have said, "We gave no such commandment." We must contend against this spirit as much now as ever. Still must we refuse to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Christ is all. We are complete in him, and we will not permit a single letter to be added to his perfect law of liberty.

Peter at the great Jerusalem council was enabled through his experience to answer those who said that unless a man was circumcised he could not be saved. Depend upon it, brothers and sisters, there is nothing like practical work for Christ to teach us Christ's truth. For the most part the heretics of the present day are a clique of literary men, adepts at the pen, but quite unable to speak. It may be that their failure in this direction sours them, and sets them upon opposing the gospel ministry. At any rate they are a set of theorizers who know nothing of practical service for the Lord, and so they make up all manner of nonsense according to their own fancies. They sit in their studies and do nothing, and then criticize those who are doing hard service and are successful in it. They are so busy with nibbling their quills and polishing their periods, that they care nothing about saving souls; and they are so intent upon making discoveries which shall manifest their own gigantic intellects that they cannot soil their hands with practical work among the poor and ignorant. Having nothing upon their hearts their whole nature runs to head, and the head being unbalanced by a busy heart takes to spinning cobweb theories and novelties of heresy. Fiercely liberal, the spirit which they manifest against the orthodox is grandly bigoted: in this they are earnest, but in little else except in engendering grievous errors, which are ravaging the churches and ruining souls. Among the do-nothings all mischief begins. Give a man practical work for Jesus, and keep him at it, and he will, like Peter, learn as he goes on, and, like a river, filter as he flows. Peter could not continue to believe in restricting the gospel to the Jews after the Lord had bidden Cornelius send for him from Joppa, that he might teach him the gospel: his actual service refined his theory. If those who ruled botanical science never saw a flower, would you wonder if they ran into gross heterodoxies of belief? A naturalist who never saw a living animal would not be likely to be very sound in his zoology; and even so, those who never deal with the souls of men, who never see penitents under conviction, nor hear the songs of new-born believers in Christ, nor see men rejoice in affliction and triumph in death, are sure to blunder when they set up for teachers. They lean back in their study chairs and blow bubbles, and vent doubts, to the subverting of the faith of many godly but feeble souls, and all for the want of something better to do. I prescribe as medicine for them, and I heartily wish they would take it, to do something for Christ and the good of fallen men. Peter got out of what would other-

wise have been his natural condition of bigotry by being exercised in the service of his Master.

Peter tells us how he came to see that circumcision was not needful. At the divine bidding he went in and preached to Cornelius and his household, and while he was preaching they believed. He had not finished his sermon before they had all become believers, and he adds, "God the heart-knower bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he gave unto us." They believed, and he knew that their faith had purged their hearts; for the Lord sent the Holy Ghost upon them there and then. The Holy Ghost dwells not in unclean hearts, but when the temple of the heart has been purified, there he comes. Though these men had never been circumcised, yet they were purified in heart, for the Spirit of God rested upon them: it was evidently the same Spirit which had descended upon the circumcised ones at Jerusalem, since it produced the same results, "for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." Now, if the Spirit put no difference between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, why should the church do so? Peter therefore said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" He therefore commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord, and thus affirmed his belief that faith had purified them. He saw that the Lord had given the choicest of gospel blessings to uncircumcised believers, even the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore he felt that they were to be received into the church without circumcision. Peter's argument is eminently clear and convincing. You and I cannot be impartial, because we, being Gentiles, are naturally pleased with an argument which includes us in the blessing, but if we were sitting as judges to listen to the pleading of the apostle, I feel sure we should say,—Whether it bless us or curse us, the reasoning is unanswerable: if God would not give the Spirit except the heart had been purified, then these men's hearts were purified, and it is evident that they were purified by faith alone, seeing that they were uncircumcised and altogether outside the Jewish law. Seeing, then, that they are pure in heart, what need can there be of further purification? What need to lay upon them the outward and visible sign, the putting away of the filth of the flesh, when it is proved by divine witness that they are pure in heart already? It is well argued, Peter, and we rejoice in the conclusion.

Now let us consider the point upon which the argument depends, the statement which made to a great extent the hinge of Peter's reasoning—namely, that by faith the hearts of the Gentile believers had been purified.

First, consider *the agent of this purifying*, "by faith;" secondly, *the secret of its power*, it was God that purified them by faith; thirdly, *the seat of its action*,—"purifying their hearts"; and, fourthly (what is not in the text, but which we gather from our own experience), *the mode of its operation*, or how faith purifies our hearts.

I. First, then, dear friends, let us speak of **THE AGENT OF HEART PURIFICATION—faith**. There was nothing but faith in the case of Cornelius, nothing but ordinary faith such as you and I possess, faith born of hearing, and resting alone on Jesus. *Faith alone did it.*

Read Peter's sermon to Cornelius, and you will perceive that his faith was not created by Peter's eloquence, and did not stand in the wisdom of man. Peter told a very simple story about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, just such a story as a converted lad from our Sunday schools might relate, in fact, "the old, old story;" and while he was telling it, I hope not so hoarsely as I am compelled to do this morning, the power of God was present, and the centurion and his family believed the testimony. The innate power of the story itself, by God's blessing, wrought faith in the hearts of his hearers, and they were straightway purified by that faith. If I were to talk of Jesus Christ and his matchless death this morning, and some of you hearing the story were to trust him, you would be purified just as these Cæsarean believers were. Their faith came by hearing, just as yours would, and they heard the very same gospel of the grace of God which I would preach to you. By such faith hearts are purified.

Their faith purified them directly. They were not purified by month after month of contemplation. Faith purified their hearts immediately, for, to the astonishment of the circumcised believers who were looking on, the Holy Ghost fell upon them there and then, the evidence from heaven that their faith had made them meet for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. What matchless energy is this which purifies hearts stained with original sin, and defiled by actual transgressions, and cleanses them at once! The sacred power which requires not even a single day for its marvellous operations, but achieves its purpose in a moment, is worthy of our highest admiration. How speedy is the work! The hearing ear, the believing heart, the purified heart, these three follow each other in rapid succession, without long pauses of dread conviction or dreary doubt. Delays do occur in some cases, but they are not necessary to the work, neither are they of the Lord. Here the operations of mercy followed upon the heels of one another: hearing, believing, purification, the gift of the Spirit, the public avowal of the same by baptism into the sacred name, came in rapid succession, and herein you see the wondrous power of faith, whereby the soul is purified at once.

The agent of the purification was faith *alone*, and it is clear from the narrative that *water baptism did not aid therein*. It is supposed by those who deal with suppositions only, for they certainly can have no facts to support their theory, that there is something purging in baptism. Do they not say that by it they are made members of Christ, children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven? Now, no babe has ever yet given any evidence that such a thing took place; how could it? The little creature is unconscious at the time, and as he grows up he does not show any superiority to others who have not undergone the aqueous regeneration. We find our unbaptized sons and daughters converted by grace in quite as large a proportion as those little members of Christ and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. These "children of God by sprinkling" show evidently that they need converting, for they grow up to be heirs of wrath, even as others. The regeneration seems to be only skin deep if we may judge by the character of ninety-nine out of every hundred of those who are thus regenerated. But in this case there was no mistaking the meaning of baptism,

for Cornelius and his household were not baptized till after they had received the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost was the sign that their hearts were already purified. Now, my brethren, the Lord will not permit us to mix up even his own ordinances with the work of his blessed Spirit in purifying the heart by faith alone, and God forbid we ever should fall into such an error. No; soul-purification is of faith, it is not of baptism: it is not by any outward rite even of God's own ordaining, nor by the will of man, nor by blood, nor by birth, but by the work of the Holy Spirit through the agency of faith and that alone.

If it should, however, occur to some brother that peradventure the case of Cornelius may have been somewhat special because he had been a devout man and an alms-giver even before he knew the gospel, I reply that Peter in his narrative and argument said not a word upon that point, but he held forth the centurion's case simply as that of an uncircumcized person who had believed, and had been purified in heart. It seems to me clear enough that if Cornelius, instead of having been a devout man, had been called by God out of the utmost profligacy he would have been purified in heart in precisely the same manner. If not, Peter was unfair in quoting as a typical instance what would have been a palpable exception to the rule: but he speaks of the centurion and his family as being specimens of what God was doing for Gentile believers, so that he saw nothing at all exceptional about them; saw, indeed, nothing but that they were believers and were purified in heart by their faith. The fact is that the instrument by which hearts are truly purified is faith which cometh by the hearing of the gospel, and this is all; and so I say to you upon this point, even to you who know not the Lord as yet, *do not be looking for pure hearts within yourselves before you come to Christ by faith.* Do not look for the fruits before you have the roots, but look by faith to the great purifier, however impure you feel your heart to be. There is a blessing for the pure in heart, but you cannot claim it at present, and therefore be it yours to believe as sinners in whom is no good thing whatever. Though you mourn the deep depravity of your nature do not vainly endeavour to alter it before you believe, but, sinner as you are, condemned by the verdict of your conscience, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that you may be completely renewed. I beseech you seek purity of heart by faith alone, for you will be disappointed if you search for it in any other way. Do not think that anything else can touch the matter, for it cannot; no washing and cleansing can make the Ethiopian white, only the Redeemer's divine power can do it. Read your Bibles by all means and pray by all means, and hear sermons by all means, but none of these things can avail to change the radical impurity of your inward nature. Faith must behold the bleeding Lamb and know the virtue of the water and the blood which flowed from his pierced side, and until then the soul must remain in the impurity of the fall. All the efforts of unbelieving nature do but plunge us deeper in the mire and increase our defilement. Faith is that branch of hyssop which, being dipped in the blood of Jesus, makes the heart clean from sin, and nothing else will do this. Look thou, then, poor soul, away from thyself that thou mayest have thyself renewed. Look to thy black, disordered, and loathsome

self and mourn, but look not there for cure; that were to seek for riches amid bankruptcy, and death amid life, to search for hell in heaven and for God among demons; look thou to Jesus, whom God hath set forth to save his people from their sins, and as thou lookest to him faith will purify thy soul.

II. How is faith strong enough to do this? What is **THE SECRET OF ITS POWER**? Believing other things does not purify the soul; why does believing the gospel? Trusting is a very simple act; how does it come to pass that trusting Christ becomes the means of cleansing to the heart? I answer, because *God works by it*. Let us read our text with the preceding verse. "God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Who was it that was purifying their hearts? The answer is clear. It was the omniscient God. Ah, brethren, you must not look alone to the instrument which the Lord uses, but you must have regard to his own power which he puts forth in connection therewith. Faith alone would be nothing, but when God worketh by faith wonders are accomplished. You know the old story of the sword of Scanderbeg with which he used to cleave men in twain from the crown of the head downwards. As one looked at it he declared that he saw nothing about the sword to make it so fatal a weapon; but the other replied, "You should have seen the arm which was wont to wield it." Now faith looked at of itself appeareth to be contemptible, but oh, the arm that wieldeth it! Who shall resist that everlasting arm? Jacob may be but a worm, but God can thresh the mountains with him. Faith may be but a poor besom; but when Jesus comes to purge the temple of the heart he sweeps out all the accumulated filth by this feeble means. This greater than Hercules careth little for the weakness of the instrument, but behold he cleanseth the Augean stable of our nature with no other agency than childlike faith. God works through faith, and so faith doeth marvels.

Ah, beloved, if thou believest on the Lord Jesus Christ thine inbred sins have another champion to meet them beside thyself. God himself is with thee for thy captain, and he will use thy faith to be the ram's horn to lay low the walls of Jericho, or to be as the pitchers and the trumpets, by whose means the Midianitish myriads were overthrown. Thine iniquities shall bow before his grace. Only do thou trust, and thy poor childlike trust shall be in God's hand the sacred scourge of small cords which shall free thy soul from all the thieves who now make it their den.

Besides, the text suggests that *God is at work in the heart by his Holy Spirit*. Now, where the Holy Spirit comes, he burneth as a heavenly fire, and consumeth sin. He comes also as a flowing stream and cleanseth away evil, and as a rushing mighty wind to chase away all that is foul and polluted which has gathered in the stagnant air of the soul. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of holiness, and as he always dwells with faith, being its author, its strengthener and guardian, you may be sure that where faith comes the heart will speedily be purified.

The fact is, brethren, faith sees sin, loathes it, and flings itself into the eternal arms to be delivered from it. Faith feels sin like a huge

mountain pressing on its bosom and crushing down its heart, and faith crieth, "Eternal God, thou hast promised to deliver thy people from their sins. Lo, I invoke thy power, and challenge thy promise; I cast myself upon thy might to lift this load from off my bosom, and to let me breathe freely as being delivered from its terrible weight." All is well when such an appeal is believably made. When you bring God into your quarrel it is ended. When you lay hold on the divine strength Goliath falls though your weapon be but a sling and a stone. Here is the power of faith, that she wears the promise of her God as her girdle of strength. She hath laid hold upon the omnipotence of him that maketh heaven and earth to stand. Well may she perform miracles, for God is at her beck and call. See, then, where the power of faith lieth whereby she works the purification of the soul:—it is God that worketh by her.

But you say, "How does God purify the heart? He cannot do it by physical force." No. Who thought he could? But he does it by his wisdom which was never baffled yet, bringing before the human mind arguments which suit the case, revealing truths which convince the understanding, and plying the conscience with facts which gain its verdict. If human wisdom wins men's minds, what shall infallible wisdom do? Together with omnipotent wisdom there is the most important element of irresistible love. Do you think there is no power anywhere but that which can be measured by pounds, and gauged as we compute the force of steam in the locomotive engine? Ah, sirs, in the impulse of persuasion, in the force of conviction, in the plea of love, there are powers which never violate the human will, but yet rule it with sacred supremacy. What is stronger than the power of love,—love which makes the most obdurate at length to yield, love which compels the most malicious to love in spite of themselves, love which surprises men into repentance and gratitude or ever they are aware of it? God loveth men until they must love him. God loveth them with such omnipotence that at last they hurl their weapons of rebellion down, and submit with eagerness. Nothing conquers like love. Now it is because faith trusteth in this wisdom and this love, and these come to aid her in her war with sin, that the raging lusts and wayward passions of the heart are subdued, and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

So, then, I say, as I leave this point, brethren and sisters, remember humbly and hopefully that the battle is not yours after all: the Lord has undertaken the conflict, and he will gain the victory. The conquest of sin is to be achieved by the Almighty: you are to wrestle and contend, but God in you is the winner of the contest. Since then God is with you, nothing is impossible; there is no constitutional fault which you cannot remedy, there is no strong passion which you cannot check, there is no inward desire however fierce which you cannot at last destroy. Have courage. High degrees of sanctity are possible to you now that God is with you. Despair of nothing; doubt not, for in all things you shall be more than conquerors, through him that loved you. Only let your faith continually fling herself upon the omnipotence of God, and you shall see that he will purify your hearts.

III. Thirdly, let us consider that THE SEAT OF FAITH'S ACTION is primarily the heart,—*"purifying their hearts."* I will not speak upon

this topic more than to outline what I would have said had I been able to utter my words with greater rapidity. Infirmities of voice are a sad hindrance to ministers: pray that they may be removed, for in my case at least the brain is slow when the speech is hampered.

Faith changes the current of our love, and alters the motive which sways us: this is what is meant by purifying the heart. It makes us love that which is good and right, and moves us with motives free from self and sin—this is a great work indeed. Hence the change which faith produces is very *radical and deep*. It is a small matter to wash the outside of the cup and of the platter, the inside of the cup must be first and chiefly attended to. If the heart be changed the conversion is *thorough and complete*—not a mere superficial affair, but a through and through renewal. “Rend your hearts and not your garments,” was God’s command to his people, and faith acts in this spirit; it does not begin with the garments, nor frame regulations for the external actions, but it begins with the inner man. Faith lays the axe at the root, it heals the stream at the fountain head, and what is done is therefore thoroughly, effectually, and honestly done.

But the heart being purified, the purification becomes *operative* throughout the whole life. A diseased heart means a sickly man all over; you cannot get your heart wrong but what every organ is in its measure wrong, the whole life is disarranged. Neither can you have the heart right without its telling upon the entire nature and affecting for the better all that is within you, and all that comes forth of you, of thought, and word, and deed. There is nothing like beginning at the heart out of which are the issues of life. All else is poor patchwork, but to have the heart made new is to be renewed indeed. Hence such a change is *permanent*. Restrain appetites which still remain, and the dog returns to his vomit; purify externals and leave the nature untouched, and the sow that was washed goes back to her wallowing in the mire. Transform the dog to a sheep, change the swine to a child, and you shall not see the old habits return, but without this all human goodness is as a fading flower. Such a purification is *acceptable with God*, who searcheth the heart. Man judgeth according to the outward appearance, but God looketh at the heart; and so faith in purifying the heart produces a purification which is well pleasing before God.

The sum of this is, brothers and sisters, do not begin seeking after the purification of your hearts and then seek after faith in Christ as a second thing. No; let all things be done in order. Emotions are good if they be good, but they are not the source of purity nor antecedent to faith. Faith is the parent of right emotions; never confound the mother with the children. If you would have men purified, aim by the blessing of God to produce faith in them. The preaching which only stirs the passions is of small value. We have heard a good deal about crowds weeping, but we had rather see one individual believing. We count it far better to lead a man to believe with his heart than to cry with his eyes; and, therefore, I aim rather at preaching Christ crucified, so as to beget faith, than to paint pathetic pictures of death-beds and dying mothers, which things work on the emotions but have small tendency to lead to faith. If first of all we believe that Jesus is the Christ and come to rest in him the emotions will be brought right enough in due

time ; the heart will be changed where once faith assumes the sway. But if you have a faith which never touches your heart, a faith which never causes you to rejoice or mourn, a faith which neither makes you hate sin nor love the Lord Jesus, I charge you shake off your faith as Paul shook the viper from his hand, for it is a deadly faith ; and if instead thereof you should feel an aching heart, and a deep sense of alienation from God, the change will appear terrible to you, but it will be conducive to your highest good. Only the living faith which works upon the heart and influences the desires and the affections can be the faith of God's elect. A moonlight faith, which has light but no warmth, is a thing of the night, and is not the faith of the children of the day. Faith which lives in the cold garret of the brain, and never descends into the parlour and banqueting room of the heart, will starve with cold, and it is not the life which the Holy Spirit works in man. Judge you what I say, but if you forget all, still remember that faith stands first, and then the heart's purification follows as a consequence. Never put the cart before the horse, nor the effect before the cause ; do not expect the fruit of holiness without the root of faith, nor try to increase purity, which is a result, without first strengthening the faith which is its original.

IV. Lastly, let us consider THE MODE OF FAITH'S OPERATION,—how does faith go to work to purify the heart ?

Observe, dear friends, first, that faith believes in sin as sin, and sees the horror of it as an offence against a holy and gracious God, in whom faith devoutly believes. Faith believes in hell, and sees the "smoke of its torments going up for ever and ever." Faith believes in the "worm that dieth not, and the fire that never can be quenched." Faith, "the evidence of things not seen," places before the soul in dread array the pomp of that tremendous day when Christ with clouds shall come, so that the soul sees sin to be an exceedingly dreadful and damnable thing, and turns to God for deliverance from it : this is one element in the purification of the soul.

Next, faith delights to set Christ before the heart and to make it gaze upon his bleeding wounds and pierced side and marred face. Faith makes him no dream, but a reality ; she causes the soul's ears to hear his groans and listen to his "Lama Sabachthani." The soul perceives that when sin was laid on Christ it bruised him sore and crushed him down, and therefore the heart hates the sin which slew its best friend, and here is another element which worketh towards its purification.

Faith delighteth much in the person of Christ, and therefore she sets before the soul his incomparable loveliness, as the well-beloved of saints. To faith Christ is not an historic personage that flitted over the page of history even as a passer-by moves before a camera when an artist is taking a street photograph, and leaves a dim trace of his having passed across the scene while the picture was being fashioned. Faith has learned to see Christ stand out as the most real man that ever lived, the fact of the ages, the focus of truth. Faith touches, handles, embraces, and feeds upon Christ. She has been so familiar with him as to have been kissed with the kisses of his lips, and she has been filled with his love, which is better than wine, and therefore she feels his constraining power and follows him. Faith is Christ's familiar friend : faith is as

John, that lieth even in his bosom, and there enjoys *his* love and pours forth *her own*. Faith by revealing the love and loveliness of Christ to the soul kindles in the heart a vehement flame of love to him, and this fire of love becomes a powerful element of purification, for you cannot love Christ and love sin, you cannot feel gratitude for deliverance from evil and then go and plunge into it again.

Further, faith has a wonderful art of realizing her gracious privileges. Faith says to the man, "Dost thou not know that thou art God's elect? The eternal Father wrote thy name in his book of life before he lit up the lamps of heaven. How oughtest thou to live? Thou art redeemed, the blood mark is on thee, thou art not thine own, but bought with a price, what a holy life thine ought to be! Thou art precious to the heart of God, thou art his Hephzibah, he delighteth in thee. Thou art his child, no more a servant, but a son. Thou art Christ's bride; yea, thou art a part of his mystical body, thou art one with him,—how oughtest thou to behave thyself?" Brothers, sisters, did you ever realize any one of these blessings without feeling that such privileges purge the soul? Did they not each one of them seem to say to you, "What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness, since you are partakers of mercies like these?"

Faith has yet further a wondrous power of acting upon the telescopic principle, by bringing near to us the things to come. Hath she not even opened to us the gates of pearl, and set the golden streets a-glittering before our eyes? How near to faith's far-seeing eye, oh thou blessed Jerusalem, thy celestial splendours have appeared! At such seasons, so far from thinking that we would indulge in sin because we felt our heaven secure, we have groaned after more purity and begun to put our shoes from off our feet, for we have felt that even the suburbs of heaven, where we then stood, were holy ground. Transported by faith's vision we have commenced to put on the snow-white robes of the immaculate. Having this hope in us, we have purified ourselves, "even as he is pure." O ye who are brothers to perfect spirits, coheirs with the glorified of the crown of life that fadeth not away, with angels for your servitors and Christ himself for your elder brother, what should be the manner of our walk and conversation! We feel that we shall never be perfectly contented till we are perfectly holy, and unblameable, and unreprouvable in his sight. What could more effectually purify the heart than the vision of heaven, which faith presents to us?

Suffer me now to crowd a number of matters together, to show you that faith does not merely give us motives, but that it really finds us power. I will tell you how faith does this, for I have tried it in fighting against sin. Power is gained by faith through pleading the promises of God. Did you ever feel that you could not master a sin, and have you then gone and knelt down and cried: "Lord, thou hast said, 'sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace,' Lord save me from the tyranny of sin, which it now seeks to exercise upon me." Did you ever plead that other promise, "I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin?" Did you ever cry, "Lord, I will not let thee go till thou hast taken away my bonds, and delivered me from the iniquities which prevail against me?" Then I am sure you

have obtained help of God. Thus does faith, by pleading God's own word, gain power to master sin. Try her sacred art. Believe without a doubt the faithful Promiser, and hold him to his word, a word from which he never did draw back, and never will, for he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.

Faith daringly layeth hold upon the power of God himself. On the strength of the promise she grasps the divine hand; she has the sacred impudence, the consecrated impertinence, to thrust herself near the throne, and lay hold upon God, for she has heard him say, "Let him lay hold upon my strength." And oh, beloved, how she smites the Philistines then! How she lays iniquity low when once God, the irresistible slayer of sin, has come to her help. She constrains him to come by laying hold upon him, and then she routs all her adversaries.

Faith brings us real power to conquer sin by applying the blood of Christ. She does not merely talk of the atonement, but she delights in it as her own and makes a medicine of it for the curing of sinful habits. The blood of Jesus is the life of faith and the death of sin. All the saints overcome through the blood of the Lamb; we sprinkle it before us, and kings of armies flee apace. The atonement by blood, the literal substitution of our Lord, the smarting suretiship, the triumphant righteousness, and the representative glorification of the Lord Jesus are all great purifiers of the soul,—sharp swords with which to smite sin. Rest happily in him who died for you and rose again, and you will be strong for virtue, sin shall lose all power over you. The blood of Jesus is the chief, and, indeed, the only fountain for cleansing; it is the supreme source of holiness, the preparation for heaven. Faith getteth us power, for she plunges us in the atoning blood which is our life.

Faith herself also gives us power against sin by mixing herself with all gospel ordinances. We read of some, "that the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Faith is a necessary ingredient to be mixed with means and ordinances to give them savour and efficacy. With hearing sermons, attending communions, private prayer, Bible study,—mix faith. "Without prescribing how much," mix faith, and the more the better. Faith will enable you to draw the nourishment and essence out of gospel ordinances, and so it will make you vigorous in agonizing against sin.

Last of all, faith rouses the new man to intense resistance of sin. Faith like a trumpet wakes up the unsinning new nature to battle, and leads it into the thick of the fight. Did I startle you when I said the "unsinnew new nature"? I said it advisedly, for it cannot sin because it is born of God; there is within the regenerate man a principle of divine birth, a seed which is incorruptible which will remain and abide in the renewed soul for ever and ever; this seed or principle faith excites into growth and energy. Faith arouses love, stirs up courage, girds patience with her girdle and perseverance with her shoes, excites zeal and stirs up jealousy, bestirs desires after holiness, and quickens the diligence of devotion, and so it keeps the powers of evil in check and purifies the heart. This is a brief sketch of how faith purifies from day to day the soul of man.

I have done when I have said—see, then, to the simplicity and

energy of your faith. Beloved, "as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in him." As you believe in him unto justification believe in him to sanctification. If anybody tells you that you are to get justification in one way and sanctification in another way believe him not, Jesus Christ is made of God unto us sanctification as well as redemption. Pharisees virtually teach us that we are to be sanctified by the law though justified by faith; but we know better. These are twin covenant blessings, and are not to be had apart. Believe in Christ to conquer sin as well as to pardon sin. Believe that the only power which can subdue a base passion in thee is the power which washed thee from thine iniquity of old. Trust Christ with the power of sin as well as the guilt of sin. Thou needst not go through a round of performances in order to be purified in heart, thou needst not look for a higher life than Jesus gave thee when thou didst look and live: there is no higher life, for he gave thee his own. What more dost thou want than the Holy Ghost which quickens thee—what is higher than that? What more canst thou have than faith has brought thee, and will bring thee? Jesus has given thee himself. Didst thou believe in half a Christ at the beginning? Didst thou receive from him a lower and inferior life? Oh, shame on thee to think so. Thou didst trust thy soul wholly with him, didst thou not, and did he not give his whole self to thee? Dost thou mean to say that thou didst trust him to save thee from hell, and not from sin? Didst thou trust *him* to blot out the past, and wert thou fool enough to trust to *thyself* for keeping in the future? If so, thou didst not believe in him at all, thy faith was faulty at the very core, for Christ must be everything or nothing; and if hitherto thou hast been so foolish as to have half a Saviour, and if even now thou art looking for something which is not contained in him, be foolish no longer. Go back to the very beginning, and say, "Blessed Saviour, just as I am I come to thee. Behold, I take thee to be all in all to me, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Doing this thou shalt find all in Jesus, and by faith thy heart shall be purified.

I had intended to appeal to sinners, but my voice refuses to be longer tried, and so I leave it with the prayerful desire that the whole subject may appeal to seekers and encourage them. God save you. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xi. 1—18;
xv. 1—31.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—166, 639.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ENLIVENING AND INVIGORATING.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Quicken thou me according to thy word."—Psalm cxix. 25.

You will frequently find David uttering this petition; it is a favourite prayer of his: "Quicken thou me, O Lord!" And, as David was like the rest of us—indeed, his experience is the mirror of the experience of all believers—you may depend upon it we have all great need to pray as he did: "Quicken thou me, O Lord!" If he felt a coldness and deadness frequently stealing over him, so do we. Did he find it hard to endure such a wretched state, so ought we also to loathe and abhor it. And as he cried to the strong for strength, and knew that quickening must come from God, we ought to know—I trust we do know—the same resource under the same necessity. Therefore let it be our prayer now, and let the like prayer be repeated often:—"Quicken thou me, O Lord, according to thy word."

How are we to understand this quickening? It means, of course, making alive, keeping alive, and giving more life,—in a word, enlivening. He was alive: he was a spiritual man, or else he would not have asked for life; for dead men never pray, "Quicken me." It is a sign that there is life already when a man is able to say, "Give me life, O Lord!" This is not the prayer of the unconverted; it is the prayer of a man who is already regenerate, and has the love of God in his soul: "Quicken thou me, O Lord, according to thy word." Quickening, of course, comes to us at first by regeneration. It is then that we receive spiritual life; and as there is no natural life in the world except that of which God is the author, so assuredly in the new world there is no spiritual life except that which God has created. The first quickening is that which comes upon us when we begin to feel our need of a Saviour, when we begin to perceive the preciousness of that Saviour, and when with a feeble finger we touch the hem of the Saviour's garment: then are we quickened into newness of life. But that spiritual life needs every day to be kept alive. It is like the life of a fire, which

must be fed with fuel and supported with air. It is like our natural life, which needs food to sustain it, and needs to breathe the atmosphere in order to its continuance. We are as much creatures of God's power in our continuing to live as in our commencing to live; and, spiritually, we owe as much to divine grace that we remain believers as that we became believers. As soon as we get spiritual life, this prayer is most proper as a sacred instinct, "Lord, continue this life in my soul, continue to quicken me; for, if thou dost not, I have no life in myself apart from thee, and I should die were I severed from thee, as doth a branch when severed from the vine. Continue therefore, good Lord, to quicken me."

Obviously, too, some special invigoration and excitement of life must here be implied. The trees all through the winter are alive. Their substance is in them when they cast their leaves. The vitality is not extinct, though our poet of "The Seasons" does sing—

"How dead the vegetable kingdom lies :
How dumb the tuneful choir!"

A divine act of power secretly maintains the life, hidden away till the spring-time comes. Then the chains of frost are broken, the genial warmth begins to light upon the sealed buds, the sap flows, and the trees in their reviving tints and bursting buds give such promise of returning foliage and flower that in a very special sense they may be said to be quickened. As soon as the sap begins to rise, the buds swell, the leaves unwrap themselves, and the concealed flowers gradually open: a quickening comes over what was alive, and what had been kept alive all through its dreary, wintry time. So, beloved, you see, first of all, God gives us life, then he maintains life, and then at times and seasons (would to God they were more frequent, and even without intermission!) he gives vigour to that life, so that it becomes more manifest and mighty; and then it is that in a conspicuous manner the quickening is seen. I would to God that he would lead some poor sinner to pray in the very first sense of the word: "Lord, quicken me; give me life;" it would be a sign that life was coming. I would that every Christian would incessantly pray the prayer in the second sense: "Quicken me, Lord"—that is, "Continually keep me faithful and true to thy word." And then, thirdly, I would that we would all go on to the third sense, and say, "Lord, inspirit me, revive me, lift me up unto a higher life, fill me with more of thy Holy Spirit, and so make me more truthful and more like thine ever living Son Jesus, who hath life in himself."

Having thus introduced to you the prayer, I would use the psalm to explain it—to explain, rather, the experience which commends the prayer to our constant use.

First, brethren, I would assign *some reasons why you need quickening*; secondly, I would point out *some motives to seek it*; thirdly, we shall mention *some ways in which it is wrought*; and fourthly, we will suggest *pleas, such as the psalmist used, for obtaining it*.

I. THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY WE SHOULD SEEK QUICKENING.

You cannot overlook that confessed in the text—because of *the deadening influence of this world*: "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken

thou me according to thy word." We are surrounded with dust. We are associated with dust. The best and brightest things that are in this world are made of dust; and as for ourselves, although we have within us a new and higher life that has no fraternity with the dust, there is an old life belonging to us which is brother to the dust—which saith to the worm, "Thou art my sister." "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," is true of every one of us. Yet, beloved, we cannot feed on the dust; that shall be the serpent's meat, it may not be ours. The new life in us craves for something higher, but the old nature tries to be contented with dust. It clings to it; the dust cleaves to it, and it cleaves to the dust. You know how the care and cross, the work and worry of a busy day will often damp your ardour in prayer and disqualify your thoughts for devout meditation. You cannot think much of treasure laid up in heaven if you think a great deal of this world's goods. Riches are often a dangerous incumbrance to those who seek after righteousness; they steal the heart away from God. Matthew Henry, in his own racy style, warns us that the care in getting, the fear in keeping, the temptation in using, the guilt in abusing, the sorrow in losing, and the responsibility of giving account for gold and silver, houses, and lands, accumulate a heavy burden for him to bear who would have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man. And yet if you have but little of this world's wealth you will find poverty a trying ordeal. The cares of poverty, like those of property, often break the calm repose which our faith ought to enjoy. If things go smoothly with you in business, then those smooth, deceitful streams bear you away from God; and, if they go roughly with you, then in the deep and in the storm you are too apt to forget the Lord or to murmur against his providence. There is nothing in this world to help a Christian; it is all against him. The world holds us to itself as tightly as it can: it acts like bird-lime to us. When we would mount on the wings of eagles we are often like the eagle that you see in the gardens where they keep such creatures: there is a chain to our foot, and we cannot rise. Our soul cleaveth to the dust. Now, as this is the case, and as you cannot get out of the world, do pray that you may rise superior to its influence. You men of business, you heads of families, you who guide and you who follow, you who are sociable and you who are solitary, all of you must still be in the world and mix with men of the world, therefore cry to God, yea, cry mightily, "Lord, deliver us from the deadening influence of the world in which we live! Quicken us, we beseech thee, from day to day!"

A second reason for our need of quickening lies in *the influence of vanity*—of that which is actually sinful. Refer to the thirty-seventh verse:—"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way." As we go about in the world we see a great deal of that which is injurious to us. The sins of others leave some kind of stain upon the conscience. I question whether you can read a newspaper and scan the story of a murder or a robbery, or survey with more distant glance in any book of history the sin of your fellow men, without being in a degree injured therewith. Much of vanity and sin we are compelled to see in our daily callings; we do not merely read of profanity but we hear the oath. You enter into a railway carriage, and you cannot always avoid

hearing conversation which is the reverse of pure: you go into your house, and, unless you are happily situated so that all are Christians, there will be a great deal of which you cannot approve, and which can be of no benefit to your soul. Besides, the whole world runneth after its own idols: men seek each man his own, and not the things of Christ, and all these things are vanity. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity." Our eyes are often fascinated by the glitter and the glare of these vanities. The world puts on a very beauteous complexion; she attires her head and paints her face like Jezebel, and it is not always easy, like Jehu, to detest her, and to say, "Fling her down, and let the dogs consume her." We have nought to do with this vain world. We are not citizens of this land. But, truly, Madam Bubble, as Bunyan calls her, with her purse and her person, continually presenting herself, is enough to make even Standfast himself to stagger, and he need to fall on his knees, and cry, "Quicken me, O Lord, and turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." There is thus a second good reason why we should seek for quickening.

Sometimes we shall have need to cry for quickening because *we are surrounded by deceivers*. Turn to the eighty-seventh and eighty-eighth verses:—"They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts. Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." If you are often assailed by foes, and if those foes happen to be the men of your own household, if they jeer at your faith, if they make a jest of holiness on purpose to pain you, you will need a great deal of grace not to be ruffled. To be a dove always, to be a dove in the midst of ravens: to be a lamb always, to be a lamb in the midst of wolves, is not so easy. He must have much spiritual life who shall be able, wisely and discreetly, to behave himself in the midst of those who lie in wait to entrap him in every word that he says. Remember how David acted in the court of Saul, when Saul eyed him. Unsullied purity is the safest policy. Though Saul eyed David he could not see any fault or rake up any charge that he could bring against him. Oh that all of you young people, especially those of you who are subjected to scorn and contempt because of your fidelity to Christ, may be doubly girt with grace,—may you be, indeed, quickened to the full spiritual life, that you may stand the test of persecution and reproach, of suspicion and disparagement, of misrepresentation and slander, which is sure to come upon you. Do not pray to be rid of the grievance: rather rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer shame for your Saviour's sake. You may pray if you like that the distress may be lightened, because your strength is small; you may pray that your flight be not in the winter; but do not make that the special object of your petition. Rather pray for grace to endure it. Pray for life, spiritual life, that you may throw it off. I suppose that, in order to prevent disease, it is a good thing to remove the cause of the disease, and take away everything that produces ill savours in the air; but the sure thing is for the man himself to be vigorous as to his own life. I have no doubt many die in moderately healthy localities because they have no stamina, they are constitutionally weak, while the young man who is in robust health, may even pass through a pestiferous district, and be for hours in the midst of miasma,

without falling a prey to its deadly influence, simply because the life that is in him resists the malaria. Your business, dear friend, if you live in the midst of those that are set on fire by hell, who pour out venom against you, is to pray,—“Lord, quicken me that I may have so much spiritual life that these deleterious influences may not be ruinous to me. Deliver me from them when it is thy will; but meanwhile let me have such a full tide of life that I may be able to endure what I must encounter without being injured thereby.”

Another reason for seeking quickening will be found in the hundred and seventh verse: “I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.” *In seasons of affliction* we are very apt to fall into a dark, cold, dead state of mind. We have known persons in poverty—I have often been sorely pained by it, when members of this church who have become very poor, have given over attendance at the house of God. I could understand their reasons far better than I could appreciate them. Their pride was doubtless wounded, because they could not dress as they used to do, though I am sure nobody here thinks any better of you for dressing yourselves in fine clothes. I do not think so much of you myself. As they could not dress quite so well they felt they could not mix as they did with some with whom they were once equal in circumstances. So they have gone out of the way. It is a sad thing when they do so. I am much saddened by it. I hope none of you ever will. You ought to think that you will be more welcome at the house of God when you are in trouble than you ever were before; and if you lose your earthly possessions, it is all the more reason why you should seek to hold the faster to the riches which are above. If you are in pain, too, that kind of affliction has a great tendency to distract the mind. Who can think when the brow is throbbing? Who can be calm when every vein becomes a road for the hot feet of pain to travel on? It is not easy. Well now, we have reason, when we feel weak, when we feel that the mind is suffering in sympathy with the body, to cry, “Lord, let grace triumph over nature. Let thy Spirit have power—thy blessed comforting Spirit—to lift me up above the weight which now is laid upon me, that I may glory in tribulation also, because the power of God doth rest upon me.” You look upon a weight as a heavy matter which keeps you down, but mechanics know how to make a weight raise you. A little adjustment of ropes and pulleys and such like contrivances, and the weight shall lift you up. And the Lord knows how to make our afflictions minister to our quickening, as we shall have to show you directly; but in themselves they deaden us. They do not assist, but rather hinder; and so, whenever they come, then is the time for us to pray with especial emphasis, “Quicken thou me, O Lord, according to thy word.” Thus have I endeavoured to show you from the psalm itself some of the reasons why we need quickening.

II. Now, let us pass on to describe SOME OF THE MOTIVES FOR SEEKING QUICKENING. They are very many.

Seek it because of what you are. You are a Christian, and therefore already alive unto God. Life seeks more life; it is its natural tendency. If there is life in a tree it seeks to put forth its branches; and when it has had its spring shoot, you will notice that it then begins

to seek for its midsummer shoot; and when the midsummer shoot is over, the tree always has an eye to the shooting of the next spring; and before the old leaves go there is every preparation made for the new leaves. Life is always aiming at more life. It a law of nature. There is a propagation continually progressing in which life develops and multiplies itself. Now, if thou hast the life implanted by the Holy Ghost thou wilt long for more. If thou dost not long to have more life, it surely must be because thou hast no life. The living man will be sure to cry to God that he may have life more abundantly.

The next motive is not only because of what you are, but *because of what you ought to be*. Here is a question for you: I will leave you to answer it: "What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" We like sometimes to work out a problem. There is one to solve. Draw a picture, if you can, of what you ought to be. I will tell you, if you draw that picture exactly, what it will be like. It will be like Jesus Christ. That is the answer to this question—"What manner of persons ought we to be?" Now Christ was full of life. Although he did not strive or cry, or lift up his voice, or cause it to be heard in the streets by way of seeking after popular notoriety, yet what life was in him. He was brimful of life. There was nothing stagnant, indifferent, or purposeless in any of his actions or in all his career. Why, the life of Christ was so full that it seemed to flow out, even on to his garments, so that when they touched his garments virtue went out of him. How full must he have been of the living force—the inward power! O beloved, we ought so to be. As we are redeemed, as we are quickened by Christ, as we are members of his body, as we belong to him, we ought to reckon ourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God by Jesus Christ. Above all men that live, the Christian ought to live at the most vigorous rate. We have a race to run; we must not creep and crawl, or we shall not win the prize. We have a battle to fight; should we sheath our sword, put off our armour, and go to sleep, how can we overcome our enemies? We have an agony to endure, according to his power that worketh in us mightily, and there cannot be this resisting unto blood, striving against sin, unless all our passions be aroused and all our powers be stirred for the wondrous inward strife. We ought to ask for quickening because of what we ought to be.

Then, we ought to ask for quickening *because of what we shall be*. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Brother, you are to be a pure spirit in heaven: be spiritual now. Brother, you are to sing among the angels; rehearse the music now. Brother, you are to see his face that is as the sun that shineth in its strength: let not your eyes be sealed with dust now. Let them be clear, as clear as they can be in this misty atmosphere of earth. Brother, you are to sit upon the throne with Christ, for he saith, "As I have overcome, and have sat down with my Father upon his throne, so also shall you sit with me upon my throne": see where you are to be, and behave yourself accordingly. You cannot maintain the dignity of your high calling, or your heavenly destiny, unless you have an abundance of spiritual life, wherefore pray, "Quicken thou me, O Lord."

Now, to come back to the psalmist's own confessions and reflections; he gives us another motive for seeking this in the eighty-eighth verse: "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." *We want quickening in order to obedience.* If our life decays, then the power of sin will get the mastery over us. We cannot go in the way of obedience and punctuality and scrupulous care and inward heartiness, unless we are daily quickened. I am sure you want to be holy, brothers and sisters. I am sure you do. Well, then, pray, "Quicken me." There is no such thing as dead holiness, it must be living holiness, and you must be made alive in order to be obedient, for there is no such thing as dead obedience. Up to the altar of God they brought birds, and they brought beasts, but they never brought fish; and why? Because they could not bring fish alive there, and there must be no sacrifice presented to God but that which hath life. Ask for life, that thou mayest have obedience.

Look at the one hundred and seventh verse and you have another reason for seeking quickening, because *it will be your comfort.* "I am afflicted very much; quicken thou me, O Lord, according to thy word;" or, better still, at the fiftieth verse, "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me." Do you want comforting? Get quickening: do not so much ask the Lord to give you sweet promises, as to give you inward life, for in life there is always light. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." As the light is the life, the life is the light; and when you get the life of God within your soul, you will get the comfort of God. I urge you to seek quickening, then, if you are under any distress, because it will be the readiest means of your finding consolation in it.

Look also at the eighty-seventh and the eighty-eighth verses, to which we have already referred, and you will see that we ought to seek quickening as *the best security against attacks of enemies.* We need not examine how we can meet the foe, or with what argument we can refute his sophistries, or with what weapons we can overthrow him. "Quicken thou me, O Lord," is still the prayer, even though they threaten to consume us from off the face of the earth. We have but to keep close to the precepts of God and pray for quickening, and we shall be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."

The use of the word "quicken" will be seen in the ninety-third verse. "I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me." We are always in danger of forgetting God's precepts; but *to invigorate our memories*, and to fortify our hearts, we must get quickening. Nothing can make a man so secure of walking rightly, and defying all the attacks of his enemies, as the reception of spiritual life. The young man can only cleanse his way by taking heed to it according to God's word; but he cannot take heed to his way if he is not alive in the way. Life is the great thing. Look at a pool of water when it stands still—how it becomes mantled over with weed, how stagnant and defiled it is; but give it vent, and let it run down yonder brook among the stones; let it leap in little cascades on its way down to the river. It is alive now, and see how pure it gets, refining as it goes, dropping all the filthiness it had accumulated before, becoming itself sweeter and clearer, because of life. So it must be with us. We must have life;

we shall forget God's precept else, and lose the purity of life, unless quickening be given to us abundantly.

If I wanted some one thrilling motive to rouse the reluctant, I would resort to this—the terrible consequences of losing spiritual life: I do not mean the effect of losing it altogether, but of lacking it in its manifest display. Alas that it should be so easy to give obvious illustrations! But I could tell you of many congregations and churches where there is no more evidence of vitality, growth, increase, than if they were all dead. I do not say that there is no spiritual life, but there is none in the sense in which I am using the term. They have fallen into a dead sleep, and the members of the church are cold, apathetic, spiritless. Life among them is at the lowest ebb. You cannot be sure they breathe; breathe—I mean—a breath of prayer. Some of them have not been to a prayer-meeting they could not tell when, do not know when they ever did go; and when they attend Sabbath services not a few of them literally sleep, and the rest of them sleep with their eyes open. The minister dozing, dreaming, snoring, talking in his sleep—that is what his preaching is like. There is plenty of preaching like that—an inarticulate snoring of the everlasting gospel. The preacher, perhaps, reads, or else he repeats what he has laboriously committed to memory, and says it as a school-boy does his lesson, and he is glad when it is over: for he considers that preaching twice on a Sunday wears him out, dear man! And well it may, as he does it. It wears his people out as well. They have no enterprise, the surrounding neighbourhood is not evangelized by them, they do not increase, they do not think of increasing, in fact, they get fewer as the good people go home to heaven. Any attempt to do anything there would be looked upon as “an innovation”: yet they do something, they have a disturbance every now and then. They hold what they call a “church meeting,” which means in their case a spiritual bear-garden, in which they show their life, and one minister is driven away and another and another—not that it is a fit place for anybody to desire to go to, you know, for there is very little to be had except abuse; but still that is the style of the thing, and there are hundreds of churches in England in that condition. O that the Lord would quicken them! May this place be reduced to ashes, and may the congregation be scattered to the four winds of heaven, sooner than it should become a huge mausoleum, a catacomb, of which it may be said “the dead are there.” Ah, it is ill to have “the means of grace” without the grace of the means, to have a name to live and to be dead. God save us from it. Take heed to yourselves; some of the members of this church, I fear, are getting into that condition; yet not, I trow, you that are present this evening. You would not, most likely, have been here on such a wet night as this if you had not some care for the things of God, but I refer to those that are not here. When you get home tell them so; tell them what I have said about it, and then perhaps they will say, “Well, if the pastor always speaks severely of those who are not there we had better go, so as to escape his strictures.”

III. Now let us mention briefly SOME OF THE WAYS BY WHICH THIS QUICKENING MAY BE WROUGHT IN US.

Of course the Lord himself must do it. In prayer it must be sought,

because by his power it must be wrought. The prayer is, "Quicken thou me, *O Lord*, according to thy word." He does not expect the quickening from any but a divine source. Whence can life come but from the ever living God? How can we expect that we should get life if while we seek the gratuity we totally forget the divine energy of him who alone can bestow it? In the thirty-seventh verse we are told how the Lord often quickens his people, namely, by turning off their eyes from beholding vanity. "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way." The Lord sometimes takes the vanity away of which we made our idol; or else he takes us away from the idol, and does not permit us to find any contentment in it. Oh, it is half the battle to be weaned from the creature. It is half the battle, I say, to get the eyes off the vanity, for then you are likely to get your eyes turned upon your God. May he be graciously pleased to quicken some of you in that way.

In the fiftieth verse we find that God quickens his people *by his word*. "Thy word hath quickened me." And the part of the word which he often blesses to this end is remarkable, for, in the ninety-third verse, it is written, "I will never forget thy *precepts*; for with them thou hast quickened me." Promises are quickening, doctrines are quickening, but David says, "Thy precepts—with them thou hast quickened me." If we preach frequently and earnestly the precepts of our Lord there are hearers who will complain and say, "The minister is getting legal." Nay, brethren, it is you that are getting dead, for when you are alive you will love God's precepts, and those precepts will quicken you. "But they pain me," says one. That is often how people are quickened. While a person is drowning, we have heard that his sensations are often really delightful; but when he is fished out of the water, as soon as ever he begins to recover life, the blood begins to tingle in the veins, and the pain is intense. The pain of returning life is something terrible. Well, so it is with God's precepts when he quickens us with them. These precepts pain us because they show us our shortcoming, expose to us our faultiness and humble us. Brother, that is the way to be quickened. When you are numbed, you know that is next door to being dead; but when that numbed flesh of yours begins to come to life again,—you have felt it, you must have felt it—when the blood begins to circulate by the rubbing, a sharp pain is excited in the part that was numbed and painless before. Be thankful for the pain that is an index of life. "I love thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me." May the Lord apply a text of Scripture to your soul with power, or let him send a word from the minister as he speaks in Jehovah's name with a divine force, and you will soon feel the effect. Though you appeared to be dead, you will start up and begin to live again. Have not you found it so full often? Have you not often found great revivings come to your sinking spirit? Pray the Lord to make his word always thus vivifying and inspiriting to you.

In the hundred and seventh verse we have another means of quickening which God frequently uses, namely, *affliction*. "I am afflicted very much: quicken me, *O Lord*, according to thy word." God frequently employs adversity as a black poker to stir us up that the flame of devotion may be brighter. When you observe the fire in your

sitting room getting dull and going out, you do not always put more coals on, but you stir it; and sometimes affliction does that for us. It stirs us and makes the life which was languishing to burst forth briskly. Be thankful if God stirs your fire.

Then, again, this quickening is sometimes wrought in us by means of *divine comfort*, as in the fiftieth verse:—"This is my comfort, for thy word hath quickened me." The great flush of comfort, the sudden inflow of supreme joy, when you were much depressed—this has greatly cheered and invigorated you; at least I know it has often been so with me. When very despondent and sad at heart, I have felt a soft stream, as though it were the Gulf-stream with its warm, genial temperature, flowing into my soul, melting all the icebergs that had gathered round my heart, and I have wondered what it was. How has my gratitude turned to my gracious God and found sweet expression in that hymn—

"Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart,
Which wonders to feel its own hardness depart,
Dissolved by thy goodness, I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found."

You will often have proved, I doubt not, how God uses the comfort of his Spirit to quicken his children.

IV. Our last point is to enquire **WHERE ARE OUR PLEAS WHEN WE COME BEFORE GOD TO ASK FOR QUICKENING?** What arguments shall we use? Well, brethren, use first the argument of *your necessity*. Whatever that necessity is, particularize it, as David does in the hundred and seventh verse:—"I am afflicted very much; quicken me." Or take our text, "My soul cleaveth to the dust, quicken me." Plead *thus* your necessities. Your wants shall be the argument for the oil and wine. Your emaciation and your hunger shall be the argument for a festival. Show the Lord what you are and where you are. Confess it before him, and this shall be good pleading. Also plead, if it be in your power to do so, *the earnest desire* that God has kindled in you. Read the fortieth verse:—"Behold I have longed for thy precepts; quicken me in thy righteousness." This is as much as to say, "Lord, thou hast given me great longings after thee. Thou gavest me these cravings: wilt thou not satisfy them? Dost thou torture me with the miseries of Tantalus? Dost thou grieve me with a thirst which thou wilt not gratify? Hast thou given me a hunger for the bread of heaven only for the sake of torturing me?" Beloved, if you have got a desire, you may depend upon it the desire of the righteous shall be granted. God does not excite the appetite without providing the aliment. If he makes you hunger and thirst after righteousness, recollect the promise, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." They shall not have merely a little, a crumb or two to stay their stomachs, but they shall be filled. Go and plead that before God. "I have longed after thy precepts; quicken thou me in thy righteousness." There is the second plea.

And then you may find a third in the very righteousness of God, as we have seen in the fortieth verse. *Appeal to his righteousness*. Do I see you start back abashed? Do I hear you say, "Oh no; I could not appeal to that, for the righteousness of God must condemn me." Stop

a minute. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and *just* to forgive us our sins." Why, the justice of God is on the side of the man who has received God's promise, because it were unjust of God to break it. He will not alter the thing that has gone out of his mouth. The Lord has given his word for it, that he will give his people life. The very fact of his having made them live at all is the proof that he means to continue to make them live. Go and plead it, then. Say—"in thy righteousness, oh Lord, quicken me." David is very often harping upon that string. As I showed you in the reading, he twice appeals to God's judgment, or his justice, that he would quicken him.

Another, and a very sweet plea is that of *God's lovingkindness*. Read the eighty-eighth verse:—"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness." Look at the hundred and forty-ninth:—"Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment." And so again in the hundred and fifty-sixth:—"Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments." "Thou pitying God, give me more life. O thou who wilt not the death of any, give me more life. O thou that lovest as a father loves, give me more life. O thou who hast graven me upon the palms of thy hands, quicken me; quicken me, I beseech thee." Are they not blessed pledges to lay hold on—his lovingkindness and his tender mercies? With such promises you will be sure to prevail.

And then what a comprehensive plea, is that of our text:—"Quicken thou me according to thy word." You have it in the twenty-fifth verse, and you have it in the hundred and seventh. He pleads *the word of God*. What that word was that David had to appeal to, it would rather puzzle me to tell you. His Bible was not so large nor near so full as ours. I do not find any promise of quickening before David's time. Perhaps, a special promise had been given to him, or, at any rate, the promise is virtually in the Pentateuch: but certainly to us there is abundant testimony to be found in the word of God, for our Lord Jesus Christ himself has told us—"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "I give unto my sheep eternal life." The Son of man hath come not only that we might have life, but that we might have it more abundantly. Plead the promises, brother; plead the promises; and, as you plead them before the Lord, you may rest quite certain that God will be as good as his word; and, if you can plead the promise the promise will be surely fulfilled to you.

Beloved in Christ, do tenderly watch over your spiritual life, or otherwise you are hypocrites when you pray "quicken me." Take heed lest you neglect the food of your souls. Do not go where your life would be in danger. Do not seek worldly company, do not indulge in worldly amusements. Keep out of all the deadening influences of the world as much as ever you can. Have you ever seen the Grotto del Cane near Naples? It has a deadly gas at the bottom of it, and they take a dog and throw him in, and when they drag him up again the dog looks as if he were dead; but by aid of a fresh water bath he comes round again. As they thus kill the poor dog half a dozen times a day, I do not envy him his experience. Indeed, I rather

think if I were that dog I would lose no time in seeking another master. Yet there are some professing Christians that will go into bad company—get into the bad gas of temptation—and then they go and hear a sermon and get back their spiritual life again. I would advise you not to be like that poor dog, but to keep out of harm's way. If you have life do your best to maintain it, and do not run the risk of suspended animation.

Knowing the worth and joy of life yourself, pray very earnestly that God would give it to others. Look on the dead in sin, but not with stony eyes. Look on them with tears. Even if I knew that my hearers must be lost, I would pray God to help me to weep over them, because our Saviour's tears over Jerusalem, you remember, were accompanied with a distinct indication that Jerusalem would be destroyed. "Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which make for thy peace! But now are they hid from thine eyes." Still he wept. We have no such terrible knowledge about the destiny of any man. We look hopefully upon you unconverted people, and we exhort you because we expect you to believe in Jesus. We sincerely trust that yet you will be saved, and therefore we pray for you in hope. May the Lord in infinite mercy lead you to feel for yourselves, and pray for yourselves.—"Quicken thou me." Do you feel that prayer welling up from your soul? Does it rise from your heart? Then, already, there is something of spiritual life there. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt have life, for he who said, "He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die," said also, "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." God give you that living faith which is the token of the life divine. To him be glory for ever and ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psaln cxix. 145—168.

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THE DIVINE CALL FOR MISSIONARIES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING APRIL 22ND, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."—Isaiah vi. 8.

BRETHREN, the heathen are perishing, and there is but one way of salvation for them, for there is but one name given under heaven among men whereby they must be saved. God in the glorious unity of his divine nature is calling for messengers who shall proclaim to men the way of life. Out of the thick darkness my ear can hear that sound mysterious and divine, "Whom shall I send?" If ye will but listen with the ear of faith ye may hear it in this house to-day—"Whom shall I send?" While the world lieth under the curse of sin the living God, who willeth not that any should perish but that they should come to repentance, is seeking for heralds to proclaim his mercy; he is asking even in pleading terms for some who will go forth to the dying millions and tell the wondrous story of his love—"Whom shall I send?" As if to make the voice more powerful by a threefold utterance we hear the sacred Trinity enquire, "Who will go for us?" The Father asks, "Who will go for me and invite my far-off children to return?" The Son enquires, "Who will seek for me my redeemed but wandering sheep?" The Holy Spirit demands, "In whom shall I dwell, and through whom shall I speak that I may convey life to the perishing multitudes?" God in the unity of his nature crieth, "Whom shall I send?" and in the trinity of his persons he asketh, "Who will go for us?" Happy shall we be to-day if earnest responses shall be heard in this house—"Here am I, send me." It is ours, at any rate, very solemnly to put the matter before you, brethren in Christ, and while we shall try to plead Jehovah's cause we trust the Holy Spirit may be here, saying of one and another, quite unknown to us, "Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have called them." Yea, may the constraining voice of the special call of grace come to the ear of some here present who shall respond like young Samuel and say, "Here am I, for thou didst call me."

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First, we shall this morning consider *the vision of glory* in reference to the offer of service made by the prophet: the vision which he saw; and secondly, *the vision of ordination* which he did more than see, for his lips were touched. Thirdly, we will speak upon *the divine voice*; and conclude by dwelling upon *the earnest response*.

I. Reverently, and with all our hearts attent, let us gaze upon *THE VISION OF GLORY* which Isaiah saw. It was necessary for him to see it in order that he might be brought into the condition of heart out of which should come the full consecration expressed in—"Here am I, send me." Observe what he saw. He saw, first, *the supreme glory of God*. "I saw Adonai," saith he, "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." Was it Jesus that he saw? Was this one of the anticipations of his future incarnation? Probably so, for John writes in his twelfth chapter, at the forty-first verse, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him,"—referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. We will not, however, insist upon that interpretation, for the word Adonai, doubtless, included at times the whole God-head, and therefore the vision may have represented the Lord himself revealed in visible form. As to his absolute essence, eye cannot behold the Lord, but he chooseth to make an apparition of himself; appearing among men in such a form as may come under the ken of their senses. Now, brethren, we know of nothing that will supply a better motive for missionary work, or for Christian effort of any sort, than a sight of the divine glory. This is one of the strongest impulses a soul can feel. Behold, O believers in the divine word, at this day the Lord God, even Jehovah, is not dethroned, but sitteth on the throne of his glory. Some know him not, and others deny him and blaspheme him, but he is still God over all blessed for ever.

See the patience of his infinite majesty,—he *sits* in calm glory upon his eternal throne. The nations furiously rage and imagine a vain thing: "he that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh; the Lord doth have them in derision." Still are his purposes fulfilled, and his soul abides in its serenity; he is the same and of his years there is no end. He sitteth as a King, observe, *upon a throne*; he never renounces his sovereignty and dominion. All things still feel the omnipotence of the reign of God. "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all." The rebellions of men, can they ever shake his firm dominion? No, but out of their wildest uproar he fashioneth order, and by their most violent resistance he worketh his own purposes. After all the Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice, let the multitudes of the isles be glad thereof. Still, despite all the hurly-burly of war, and all the wickedness of men in the dark places of the earth, and the detestable blasphemies of the heathen against the Most High, the Lord sitteth on a throne which never can be shaken.

Nor is it a mean throne either, nor one of little dignity; it is "high and lifted up." It is not merely above all other thrones by way of greater power, but over them all by way of supreme dominion over them, for he is King of kings and Lord of lords. I wish, dear brethren, we could get a glimpse of the glory and power and dominion which belong to the Most High, for if we did, though it would certainly humble us in the very dust, yet it would fire us with a consecrated indignation against

those who set up other gods ; it would fill us with a sacred courage to do and dare anything against these blind, and deaf, and dumb deities to whom it is almost too great an honour to pour contempt upon them ; and it would make us feel confidence in the ultimate success of the cause and kingdom of the living God. Since even now, while he restrains his hand he sitteth upon a throne high and lifted up, and is even now the Governor among the nations ; surely the day shall come when all nations shall behold his throne and bow before it, and God shall be seen to be Lord over all. The God whom we serve is able to give victory to his own cause. Here is *an impulse* for us in all warring for his cause and crown.

If you choose to take the text as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, what a delight it is for us to think that there is no more for him the thorny crown and the cruel lance and the contemptuous spittle, but he who bowed his head to death has left the dead, no more to die, and ascended to the right hand of God, even the Father ; God having highly exalted him, so that he now sitteth upon a throne high and lifted up. This, in fact, is the origin of our commission—"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Because all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, therefore we are to go forth and subdue the people under his feet. O when will his church fully believe in the glory of her Lord, and rejoice therein, so that his power shall fill her, as his train aforetime filled the temple. If we cannot behold his greatest glories, yet we pray that his presence by the Holy Spirit, like the perfumed smoke and the resplendent skirts of his robes, may be known among us and fill us with adoration. Did the posts of the door move at that august presence ? Let our hearts be moved also as in lowliest adoration we bow before him who is Lord and Christ.

But then Isaiah saw also *the court of the great King* ; he beheld the glorious attendants who perpetually perform homage, nearest to his throne. He says, "Above it (or rather above him) stood the seraphims," not implying that their feet rested upon the earth, or upon any other solid substance, but that they were stationary around and above the great King, poised in mid air in a circle, like a rainbow round about the throne, or as a body guard surrounding the throne of majesty. There were they, waiting to know his pleasure, on the wing ready for any errand, and adoring while they waited. These seraphim may furnish us with a pattern for Christian service : as the throne of God becomes the impulse to that service, so let these serve us as *the model*. They dwell near the Lord, and even so should we ; he is their centre and their bliss, even so should he be ours. But I specially note that they were burning ones, for such is the meaning of the word seraphims, a term applied in the Hebrew to the fiery flying serpents of the wilderness. These courtiers of the great King were creatures of fire, ablaze with ardour ; all glowing and shining they worship him, "who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flame of fire." Jehovah, who is a consuming fire, can only fitly be served by those who are on fire, whether they be angels or men. Hence that solemn question, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire ? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings ?" (Is. xxxiii. 14). None can do this but the man on fire with love divine.

In the presence of that consuming fire, it is not possible for lukewarmness or indifference to exist, they would be utterly burned up. To act as courtier before the burning throne of God requires a seraphic or burning spirit, and if we become lethargic and soulless we shall not be counted worthy to be employed on divine errands. Far hence, then, let all coolness of love and slumbering of spirit be removed. May the Lord make us, like John the Baptist, burning and shining lights.

These courtiers of God were burning ones, and they are also pictured to us—for remember these are only representations of things actually invisible, and seen only in vision—as having six wings. Such are his servants, full of motion, full of life. Some that I know of who profess to serve the Lord seem to have no wing at all, but are stolid and inactive, more like the sloth than the seraph, having more weight than wing. Those who come near him should be all in motion, quick, active, willing, awake, energetic, ready to fly upon the Lord's business with a mighty swiftness; in a word, sixfold should be their wings, that they may not tarry nor tire, nor linger nor loiter in the way. Have we such readiness of mind as this?

Having life and motion, these glorious spirits use their powers with prudence and discretion. They use not all their wings for flight, but with twain each one covered his face, for even they cannot gaze upon the dazzling brightness of Jehovah's throne, and therefore in humble shamefacedness of awe they adore with veiled countenance! "With twain he covered his feet," or his body, or his lower parts, for the seraph remembers that even though sinless he is yet a creature, and therefore he conceals himself in token of his nothingness and unworthiness in the presence of the thrice Holy One. The middle pair of wings was used for flight, for mere bashfulness and humility cannot offer complete adoration, there must be active obedience and readiness of heart for service. Thus they have four wings for adoration and two for active energy; four to conceal themselves, and two with which to occupy themselves in service; and we may learn from them that we shall serve God best when we are most deeply reverend and humbled in his presence. Veneration must be in larger proportion than vigour, adoration must exceed activity. As Mary at Jesus' feet was preferred to Martha and her much serving, so must sacred reverence take the first place, and energetic service follow in due course. The angels do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word, and thus they excel: our excellence must lie in the same direction—the union of worship with work in due proportions. The covering of the face is as needful as the flight; the burning one is as seraphic in the veiling of his feet as in the stretching of his wings. Let us pray the Lord to fill us with the divine enthusiasm which is the work of the Holy Ghost, and so make us burning ones; and then when he has winged us with sacred energy may he make us humble in mind, removing from us all vain curiosity, so that we shall not attempt to gaze with uncovered eye on the great Incomprehensible, and taking away all unhallowed presumption, so that we use no proud bravado, but cover our feet in the solemn presence of the Holy One. Let us ask God to make us ready to every good word and work, swift to go anywhere and everywhere, as he may call us, being as it were six-winged in the service of our God.

Again, another part of the vision of Isaiah in the temple was *the perpetual song*, for these sacred beings continually cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." Brothers and sisters, let us take this cry to be the life song of each one of us. Adore ye the holy God, perfection's self. Whatever he shall do with you, bless him, and call him holy still. Find no fault with his dispensations; never dare to quarrel with any of his ways. Holy, holy, holy, is he in all things. In creation, providence, and redemption he is holy, holy, holy. Praise him with ardour; be not content to call him holy once, but dwell upon the theme. Extol the Lord with all your might; raise again, and again, and again the sacred song. Adore not alone the Father, but the Son, and the ever-blessed Spirit: let the Trinity in Unity be the object of your perpetual adoration.

"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!"

While you praise his holiness do not forget his power, but adore him as "**Jehovah of hosts.**" He is as great as he is good, as high as he is holy, as potent as he is pure. He created the heavens, and the earth, and all the host of them. Legions of angels do his bidding; hosts of intelligences wait his call; all forces of nature, animate and inanimate, march at his command; from the crash of thunder to the flight of an insect all things are at his beck. Hosts of birds migrate at his direction, hosts of fishes swarm the sea at his call, hosts of locusts and caterpillars devour the fields at his order. His armies are innumerable, and all living things are in their regiments a part of his camp, which is very great. Men also, whether they will or not, shall be subservient to his supreme dominion; their armies and their navies fulfil his decrees even when they think not of him. He is Lord of all. Exult in this, and let your hearts be brave because of it.

And then dwell, that you may feel a missionary spirit, on that last part of the song, "**The whole earth is filled with his glory,**" for so it really is in one sense. "**Jehovah of hosts is the fulness of the whole earth.**" God is glorious all over the world; heaven and earth are full of the majesty of his glory, everything adores him except that wandering, wayward creature, man. Turn this ascription, for it may be so read, into a wish: "**Let the whole earth be filled with his glory.**" Read it, if you please, as a prophecy: "**The whole earth shall be filled with his glory,**" and then go you forward, O ye servants of the Most High, with this resolve, that in his hands you will be the means of fulfilling the prophecy by spreading abroad the knowledge of his name among the sons of men. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and he must reign over it. Are you going to succumb to the modern theory that the world is never to be converted to God? Is human history to end with the triumph of the devil over the church of God? Is the Lord about to give up the present battle of good with evil with feeble men as the instruments, and are the conditions of the conflict to be changed altogether? Is the Holy Spirit to fail until an earthly kingdom is set up for the Lord Jesus? Is the gospel never to spread among the

heathen? Is Christ to come upon an unenlightened heathen world, with Mahomet the false prophet still unconquered, and the harlot of Rome still upon her seven hills, and all the idols in their places? Is the battle which now glorifies God by the weakness of man to be fought out in another manner? You may believe it if you will, and go to the beds of your inglorious sloth; but methinks there is something more worthy of faith than that, namely, that God will be victorious all along the line in the present battle and in the present style of conflict. By his church, his word, and his Spirit he means to win the victory; by the testimony of weak, feeble men to the gospel of his grace he means to conquer the powers of darkness. Foot to foot with Satan has he stood since our Lord went up to heaven, near these two thousand years, and he will not end this wrestling match till he has given his foe a deadly fall, and the shout shall go up from a ransomed world, "Hallelujah! hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Our prayers will never be ended till we see the desire of pious David fulfilled when he said, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory; amen, and amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." We are looking and labouring for that consummation, and we believe that we shall realize it, though it looks most improbable, especially just now when the heathen are converting our missionaries instead of the missionaries converting the heathen, when we have had bishops turned into Zulus instead of Zulus into Christians, and several other instances less known to evil fame. We believe in the conquest of the world because we believe in the omnipotence of God. Nothing short of "dominion from sea to sea" dare we ask in prayer or seek in service for our Lord Jesus. The idols must be utterly abolished, error and sin must fly before the light of truth and holiness, the ends of the earth must yet see the salvation of our God, and the whole earth must be filled with his glory.

II. Let us now turn our thoughts to THE VISION OF ORDINATION. This man Isaiah was to go forth in Jehovah's name, but in order to preparation for so high an embassy he must undergo a process peculiar but necessary. He was brought into a state, which to human judgment would seem to disqualify him for all future usefulness, crushing the courage out of him, and leaving him like a bruised reed. By reason of the glorious vision which he saw there was no strength left in him; he was cast down as low as he could well go with a sense of his own utter unworthiness, and felt himself to be less than nothing. In the presence of God he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." "Alas, alas, alas," saith he, "woe has taken possession of my soul; I am destroyed by it." Yes, dear brother, and this is our way to success: God will never do anything with us till he has first of all undone us. We must be taken to pieces and made to undergo a process very like destruction, and then we shall be new-fashioned according to a nobler mould, more fit to be used by our great Lord. I shall not regret if every brother here called to the work of the Lord shall feel as if he could not go on with it, and shall mourn daily his incapacity, his unworthiness, and failure; for it is good for us to be laid in the dust. Downward in breakage, in crushing, in grinding, in making into dust we must go, for this is the way to be made strong in the Lord,

in the power of his might. The death of self is the life of grace. When we are weak then are we strong. We can only rise to ability for noblest errands by being emptied of all self-sufficiency, and filled with all-sufficient Spirit.

Observe, next, that *he made a confession of sin while thus prostrate*. said, "I am a man of unclean lips." Why does he lament the uncircumcision of his lips rather than the evil of his heart? It was partly because he longed to join the seraphim in their song but felt his lips unfit; and yet more because he was a prophet, and therefore his lips were the instruments of his office, and he was most conscious of sin where he felt most the need of grace. I know not that Isaiah had ever felt back any part of the truth, or that he had spoken in uncomely words, or that in his work of prophecy he had in anything been unfaithful, but yet he felt his shortcomings. There was nothing about him that you and I could have seen to find fault with, but *he* saw it, he felt it, and what minister is there that God has ever sent who does not when he surveys his ministry feel that he is a man of unclean lips? Often and often does our soul say, "Oh that these lips had language; they are poor, dumb things that will not speak aright. O that instead of flesh they were flame, that we might let fall a burning word of persuasions, entreaties, and solicitations which should run through multitudes of men like fire in dry stubble." But it is not so with us; we are often chill and lifeless, and so we are made to mourn that we have unclean lips. Who that ever saw the glory of God, or the face of Christ, would refuse to join in this confession?

And, then, this man of God *felt also a deep sense of the sin of the people among whom he dwelt*. He cried, "I dwell among a people of unclean lips." I do not think a man can be a good missionary if he looks at the sin that surrounds him. Unless it stinks in his nostrils, unless it makes his soul boil with holy indignation, unless like Paul his heart is stirred in him, how can he speak as he should speak the message of God? Familiarity with evil too often takes off the edge of tender feeling; men readily cease to weep over the sin which is always before their eyes. You may look upon the superstitions of Rome till you almost admire the gallant show, and I suppose you may regard heathen temples till the majesty of their architecture may make you forget the folly of their purpose; but it must not be so: we must feel that we dwell among a people of unclean lips, and we must bear their sin upon our hearts, repenting for them if they will not repent, and breaking our hearts over them because their hearts are as adamant against their sin. Only in such a frame of mind shall we be fit to go forth in God's service.

And do you notice that *he had a sacred awe upon him because of the divine presence*? You see how bowed down he was because his eyes had seen the King, the Lord of hosts. O favoured servant of God! Esaias, that honoured above thy fellows to behold God's throne and glory! that would not you and I give if we might but have stood in the temple and peered within the doorway, and gazed into the smoke, and have had some glimpse of the brightness; but *he* never exulted in it, on the contrary he cried, "Woe is me!" There is no thought of the dignity which the marvellous sight has lifted him, but deep in the dust he

cries, "I am undone, for I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Now this awe-full sense of the divine presence is necessary to make a man serve the Lord fitly and acceptably. Forget that God is all around you, forget that you live in his presence and are his servant, get away from him, and you can be careless, you can restrain your zeal and your conscience may be at ease; but let a man only feel that God sees him, and know that he is under his immediate guidance, and he will be aroused at once to do the will of the Lord on earth after the fashion in which it is done in heaven. He will put forth all his energies, because God should be served with our best; but conscious that when he has done his best he has fallen short of the glory of God, he will be very humble, as those should be who are in such a presence. O Lord Jesus, by thy Holy Spirit give us an overpowering sense of thy presence now. If thou wilt but do this we shall be a tabernacle full of worshippers first, and of workers afterwards, and shall cheerfully adore thee and labour for thee.

In this second part of the prophet's vision the most notable thing is *the way in which God met and removed his servant's infirmities*. His unclean lips were his great impediment; where he most needed power he most felt his infirmity, and so there came a seraph with the golden tongs or snuffers, and took a burning coal from off the altar, and touched his lips with it. What does this mean? We have the explanation: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Fellowship with the great sacrifice, the application of one of the coals which consumed the ever blessed Jesus is the way to make our lips ready for preaching. I believe that most of my dear hearers have the application of the live coal to their hearts so as to have been purged therewith, for we do believe in him who died for us; so that we are resting in his great sacrifice. But in order to be prepared for service we want to have that word yet again touching us till we feel the fire. We need fellowship with the pangs and woes of Christ; we need to feel as if we too wished to be consumed for others, as he was consumed for us. The disinterested love which made him die must come and influence us, that we may be willing to die for others too. We want just that. Did it not make you feel joy in your fellow men the other day when you read of the poor men in the pit, and of their gallant deliverers? One rejoiced that manhood could exhibit such heroism. "We can do no more," said some, "it is death to go into the pit again: we cannot rescue the poor fellows, and it is idle to throw away life for no purpose." The brave men who had been toiling there in the bowels of the earth, finding themselves in the presence of almost certain death, might well have stood back; but not so the bold Welshmen. One said, "If it is death to go and save them, I will go, death or no death," and then others came forward and said they would go also. Had I been there I should have been ready to weep, because, being unskilled in the miner's craft, I should have been helpless to assist, but they should not have lacked my heartiest cheers and most ardent prayers, nor ought else that I could have done. Assuredly since Jesus Christ has died for us, we need to be touched with something of that same zeal for the rescue of others from eternal ruin. A coal from off the altar where he was consumed must be laid on us that we may feel willing to make any sacrifice for his dear

sake and for the souls of men. That touching of the lip was the Lord's way of setting the prophet on fire where the fire was needed. He wanted lips blistered with the griefs of Christ, and burning with love to men's souls, and he had such lips bestowed upon him by his God, and so was he fit to go and preach in the name of the Lord.

Here, then, is the true ordination for a Christian worker. Yourself nothing, lying in the dust with confession of sin; but yourself purged by the great sacrifice of Calvary, and your tongue compelled to tell the tale because you have felt such royal mercy, such free mercy, such unspeakable mercy, that if you did not speak of it the very stones in the street would cry out against you. You want this for your preparation, and if you have it, my brother, you have obtained your ordination from the great Shepherd and Bishop of your souls, and you need no other.

III. When a man is prepared for sacred work he is not long before he receives a commission. We come then to think of THE DIVINE CALL. I feel in my soul, though I cannot speak it out, an inward grieving sympathy with God, that God himself should have to cry from his throne, "Whom shall I send?" Alas, my God, are there no volunteers for thy service! What, all these priests and sons of Aaron, will none of these run upon thine errand? And all these Levites, will not one of them offer himself? No, not one. Ah, it is grievous, grievous beyond all thought, that there should be such multitudes of men and women in the church of God who nevertheless seem unfit to be sent upon the Master's work, or at least never offer to go, and he has to cry, "Whom shall I send?" What, out of all these saved ones, no willing messengers to the heathen! Where are his ministers? Will none of these cross the seas to heathen lands? Here are thousands of us working at home. Are none of us called to go abroad? Will none of us carry the gospel to regions beyond? Are none of us bound to go? Does the divine voice appeal to our thousands of preachers and find no response, so that again it cries, "Whom shall I send?" Here are multitudes of professing Christians making money, getting rich, eating the fat and drinking the sweet, is there not one to go for Christ? Men travel abroad for trade, will they not go for Jesus? They even risk life amid eternal snows, are there no heroes for the cross? Here and there a young man perhaps with little qualification, and no experience, offers himself, and he may or may not be welcomed, but can it be true that the majority of educated, intelligent Christian young men are more willing to let the heathen be damned than to let the treasures of the world go into other hands. Alas, for some reason or other, I am not going to question the reasons, God himself may look over all his church, and, finding no volunteers, may utter the pathetic cry, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

But there were the six-winged seraphim. Why did not the Lord send them? Ah, brethren, that he might have done, but it is not according to the order of the gospel dispensation, for he is pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, and the preachers must be men like the rest of mankind. It is great condescension on his part that he has chosen men, and unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come whereof we speak, but he has given this honour to us, putting his treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the

power may be all his own. We ought to rejoice in this, but it is sad, surpassingly sad, that from amongst myriads of willing seraphim God's cry should come to unwilling men, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

I call to your attention again the fact that this is the voice of the one God, and it is also the question of the sacred Trinity: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" The Father, Son and Spirit thus question us, shall not the threefold voice be regarded?

Notice the particular kind of man for whom this voice is seeking. It is a man who must be *sent*, a man under impulse, a man under authority—"Whom shall I send?" But it is a man who is quite willing to go, a volunteer, one who in his inmost heart rejoices to obey—"Who will go for us?" What a strange mingling this is! "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," and yet "taking the oversight of the flock of God not by constraint but willingly." Irresistible impulse and cheerful choice, omnipotent compulsion and joyful eagerness most mysteriously combine! We must have a mingling of these two. I do not know that I could put into so many words that wonderful feeling of freeness and overpowering impulse, of necessity and freedom, but our experience understands what our language cannot express. We are willing, and yet a power is over us; we are willing in the day of God's power, coming forth as freely as the dew-drops from the womb of the morning, and yet as truly the product of divine power as they are. Such must God's servant be. I wonder if I echo and re-echo the voice of God this morning whether it will find out amidst the thousands in this house, and the thousands that may read this word, some loving responses in at least a few chosen hearts? "Whom shall I send?"—it is Jehovah's voice. "And who will go for us?"—it is the voice of the bleeding Lamb, it is the voice of the loving Father, it is the voice of the ever blessed Spirit. Does no one leap up at this moment and freely offer himself? Must I speak in vain? Ah, that were a light thing—must the voice from heaven be in vain? Did the child Samuel reply "Here am I, for thou didst call me," and will no full-grown man answer to the voice of the Eternal? With your hearts and consciences I leave it.

IV. Now comes the last point, and that is **THE EARNEST RESPONSE**. The reply of Isaiah was "Here am I; send me." I think I see in that response a consciousness of his being in a certain position which no one else occupied, which rendered it incumbent upon *him* to say, "Here am I." There was no one else in the temple, no one else saw that vision, and therefore to him the voice of the Lord came as directly and personally as if there were not another man in all the world. "Here am I." Now, brethren, if at any time the mission field lacks workers (it is a sad thing that it should be so, but yet so it is), should not that fact make each man look to himself and say, "Where am I? What position do I occupy towards this work of God? May I not be placed just where I am because I can do what others could not?" Some of you young men especially, without the ties of family to hold you in this country, without a large church around you, or not having yet plunged into the sea of business, you, I say, are standing where in the ardour of your first love you might fitly say, "Here am I." And if God has endowed you with any wealth, given you any talent, and placed you in a favourable

position, you are the man who should say, "Perhaps I have come to the kingdom for such a time as this; I may be placed where I am on purpose that I may render essential help to the cause of God. Here at any rate I am; I feel the presence of the glorious God; I see the skirts of his garments as he reveals himself to me, I almost hear the rush of seraphic wings as I perceive how near heaven is to earth, and I feel in my soul I must give myself up to God. I feel in my own heart my indebtedness to the Christ of God; I see the need of the heathen, I love them for Jesus' sake; the fiery coal is touching my lip even now: *here am I!* Thou hast put me where I am; Lord, take me as I am, and use me as thou wilt." May the divine Spirit influence some of you who greatly love my Lord till you feel all this.

Then you observe that he makes a full surrender of himself. "Here am I." Lord, I am what I am by thy grace, but here I am; if I am a man of one talent, yet here I am; if I am a man of ten, yet here I am; if in youthful vigour, here I am; if of maturer years, here I am. Have I substance? here I am. Do I lack abilities? Yet still I made not my own mouth, nor did I create my infirmities; here I am. Just as I am, as I gave myself up to thy dear Son to be redeemed, so give I myself up again to be used for thy glory, because I am redeemed, and am not my own, but bought with a price. "Here I am."

Isaiah gave himself up to the Lord none the less completely because his errand was so full of sadness. He was not to win men, but to seal their doom by putting before them truth which they would be sure to reject. We read, "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Thank God ours is not so hard a task; the Spirit of God is with us, and men are turned from darkness to light. Ought we not to be all the more eager to go? It is a point of great weight, an argument most telling. Do not refuse to feel its power, but yield yourselves up to God, seeing that he calls you to the most happy and blessed work which even he himself could commit to you.

Then comes Isaiah's prayer for authority and anointing. If we read this passage rightly we shall not always throw the emphasis upon the last word, "me," but read it also thus, "Here am I, *send* me." He is willing to go, but he does not want to go without being sent, and so the prayer is, "Lord, *send* me. I beseech thee of thine infinite grace qualify me, open the door for me, and direct my way. I do not need to be forced, but I would be commissioned. I do not ask for compulsion, but I do ask for guidance. I would not run of my own head under the notion that I am doing God service. *Send* me then, O Lord, if I may go; guide me, instruct me, prepare me, and strengthen me." There is a combination of willingness and holy prudence—"Here I am; send me." I feel certain that some of you are eager to go for my Lord and Master wherever he appoints. Keep not back I pray you. Brother, make no terms with God. Put it, "Here am I; send me—where thou wilt, to the wildest region, or even to the jaws of death. I am thy soldier; put me in the front of the battle if thou wilt, or bid me lie in

the trenches; give me gallantly to charge at the head of my regiment, or give me silently to sap and mine the foundations of the enemy's fortresses. Use me as thou wilt; *send me*, and I will go. I leave all else to thee; only here I am, thy willing servant, wholly consecrated to thee." That is the right missionary spirit, and may God be pleased to pour it out upon you all, and upon his people throughout the world. To me it seems that if a hundred were to leap up and each one exclaim, "Here am I; send me," it would be no wonder. By the love and wounds and death of Christ, by your own salvation, by your indebtedness to Jesus, by the terrible condition of the heathen, and by that awful hell whose yawning mouth is before them, ought you not to say, "Here am I; send me"? The vessel is wrecked, the sailors are perishing; they are clinging to the rigging as best they can; they are being washed off one by one! Good God, they die before our eyes, and yet there is the lifeboat stanch and trim. We want men! Men to man the boat! Here are the oars, but never an arm to use them! What is to be done? Here is the gallant boat, able to leap from billow to billow, only men are wanted! Are there none? Are we all cravens? A man is more precious than the gold of Ophir. Now, my brave brethren, who will leap in and take an oar for the love of Jesus, and yon dying men? And ye brave women, ye who have hearts like that of Grace Darling, will not ye shame the laggards, and dare the tempest for the love of souls in danger of death and hell? Weigh my appeal in earnest and at once, for it is the appeal of God. Sit down and listen to that sorrowful yet majestic demand, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" and then respond, "Ready, aye ready; ready for anything to which our Redeemer calls us." Let those who love him, as they perceive all around them the terrible token of the world's dire need, cry in an agony of Christian love, "Here am I; send me."

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus iv. 1-6;
10-18; Jeremiah i. 6-11; Isaiah vi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—148 (Song I.), 189, 964.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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STRONG CONSOLATION FOR THE LORD'S REFUGEES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 29TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."—Hebrews vi. 18.

WHEN we read such a choice verse as this we are apt at once to conclude that it "belongeth to them that are of full age, even to those who by reason of use, have had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." We set this aside as a choice morsel reserved for those who have worn well and borne the burden and heat of the day, who have attained to full assurance of faith, and therefore are able to lay hold upon rich covenant provisions. Let us at once correct this mistake, for the passage belongs to a very early form of Christian experience: it relates, indeed, to the lowest degree of Christian grace. Let me read it again. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we* might have a strong consolation." To whom does the "*we*" refer? We "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." The strong consolation mentioned in the text belongs to those who have fled to Christ for refuge, and surely this is the very beginning of the divine life; it belongs also to those who lay hold upon the hope of the gospel, and this also is a very elementary part of Christian experience. If you have only newly fled to Christ for refuge, and if by a childlike faith you have freshly laid hold upon the hope that is set before you, then the riches of grace are yours, and God's oath and promise are intended to afford you strong consolation. As far as this text is concerned, you need not examine yourselves to search for strong faith, or deep experience, or great growth in grace, or advanced holiness, for if you are but Christ's refugee and a grasper of the Lord's promise you may rejoice in the two immutable things and rest in peace.

I gather from God's beginning thus early to encourage his people, and from his laying down so much of comfort for them at the outset, that he would have them happy all their lives. It is not the Lord's mind that

the King's children should go mourning all their days. If ye hang your harps upon the willows, it is not by divine precept that ye do, for his word to the prophet is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem." He would have you clothed in raiment of rejoicing, yea, he desireth that your joy may be full. If your heavenly Father would not have you sorrowful, will you not consent to his loving wish concerning you, and drink deeply into the comfort which he provides? The Lord knew of old that his people would want comforting, for he foresaw our infirmities and our afflictions from our birth. He knew what creatures of the dust we are, how frail and feeble, and therefore he hath ordained abundant consolation, that his poor, weak, tried, and tempted people may be strengthened and cheered.

Carefully notice that the Lord has laid most stress upon the point which is most vital to the believer's comfort. He knew right well that we should often doubt his great grace, and think the covenant way of salvation to be too good to be true, and therefore that we might have no excuse for mistrust or suspicion, he has first pledged his word and then has condescendingly uttered a solemn oath, swearing by himself, that henceforth we might never raise a question about the foundations upon which the eternal settlements of love are laid. To believers he has put salvation and all other covenant blessings beyond dispute, in order that all who are interested in them might have the firmest assurance concerning them. The worst possible trial to a believer is to have it suggested to him that the gospel is not true, that pardon through the precious blood is a fiction, and that God is not reconciled through the atoning sacrifice. If we are absolutely certain as to the truth of God's gospel and our own salvation thereby then all other things are of small concern to us; and therefore hath the Lord fixed on a sure basis of promise and oath this corner-stone of our comfort, and set his promise in such a light that it becomes blasphemy to doubt it.

Our loving Father knew that we should often be assailed by the spirit of distrust, and this has led him so abundantly to certify the truth of the things which he has promised. For you know, beloved, guilt is very suspicious; when you have done wrong to a man you cannot believe him. Nothing renders you so full of doubt towards another as your own consciousness of having acted unjustly towards him. Now, when a sense of guilt comes over the soul, nature begins to say, "Can the Lord be a sin-pardoning Lord? Can he love me as he says he does? Such a base, ungrateful rebel as I, can I really have part in so great a salvation as that which God has provided and set forth?" Knowing the suspicious nature of a guilty heart, God has made his oath and promise to be two sheet-anchors to the soul, that our faith may ride out every storm of doubt.

The greatness of the mercies themselves often staggers us. When we consider God's electing love, when we reckon the amazing cost of redemption, and when we see the high honour of adoption, union to Christ, and heirship with him, we naturally exclaim—"Whence is this to me?" and, alas, we are apt to go a step further and say, "Can it be true? Is it not all a pleasant dream? Hath the Lord really made me one with Christ and called me his beloved, and will he prepare

for me also a place among the glorified?" Now, lest the greatness of the blessing should stagger our confidence, the Lord has ensured every blessing to us by a covenant rendered valid by his own act and deed; a covenant signed, sealed, and delivered, so as to be beyond all question.

Moreover the Lord knew that we should doubt his faithfulness, because we ourselves are so false. We remember many a broken promise, broken though made before the Lord; and persons who are untruthful themselves are very apt to think others so. Therefore our God, knowing the deceitful nature of our hearts, foresaw that we should be an unbelieving race, and has set two swords at the heart of our suspicions and questionings: slaying unbelief by his oath and promise.

Besides, our nature runs so cross to the whole system of divine grace that we need much assuring before we can believe it. We are always for working, deserving, and earning. Phariseeism is the religion of nature. We boast of our merit and yet we are as meritless as Satan himself. The idea of working and deserving appears to be ingrained in our nature; and as certain as the blood is red, so sure is the heart self-righteous. We cannot divest ourselves of the idea of salvation as payment for work done: that it is a gift, a free gift of grace, it is hard to make us believe. Even after conversion the old tendency betrays itself; we steal away from Jesus to Moses as often as we get opportunity, and then begin to doubt free grace. Therefore the Lord has fettered and bound us down to believing with golden chains of promise and oath. "It must be so," saith he, "the grace that I have revealed is indeed true, for I have sworn by myself." Beloved, we ought earnestly to abhor that wicked legality of ours which so often does despite to the grace of God, casts suspicion upon his mercy, and brings our souls into bondage.

Another door for doubt is found in the fear of presuming. It is right that we should be fearful of being comforted in a wrong manner, for nothing is more deadly than false peace. The Lord approves of that holy jealousy which leads us to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. I am always sorrowful when hallowed fear departs from a man, so that he no longer dreads self-deception; but yet the fear of presuming may be perverted by the evil one, and then it becomes a snare to our feet. Beloved, be sure of this, that it is no presumption to believe God; the presumption lies in doubting him. Faith is sister to humility, and mistrust is neighbour to pride. But lest any of you, tremblers, should be afraid to take the promise of God as being verity and truth to you, behold Jehovah swears it, and now you dare not doubt it. You dare not question the veracity of God who thus with "amens" and "verily" pledges his own eternal power and Godhead that the covenant of his grace shall stand fast for ever. Thus doth God lay the stress of assurance where we are apt to put the force of our doubt, and by making his own promise sure he affords to us consolation of the strongest order.

At this time, hoping that some of God's people may be comforted thereby, we shall describe the conditions of mind to which the text is addressed and the blessing which it brings. The text speaks of three states: first, we have "*fled for refuge*"; secondly, we have "*laid hold upon the hope set before us*"; and thirdly, we have "*a strong consolation.*"

I. First, WE HAVE "FLED FOR REFUGE." Although the original

of Melchisedec." By the oath of God the Son is consecrated for evermore, and, having offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, he sits at the right hand of God, able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. Well then, I, a poor convinced sinner, without any other hope, do flee away from myself to the eternal priesthood of Christ, and to the sacrifice that he has offered once for all, and I know, because God has sworn it, that his sacrifice avails for me and for all believers. In thus fleeing for refuge to our great Lord and priest, we find a strong consolation in the oath and promise of God.

The one solemn question is—Beloved hearers, have you fled for refuge? Are you the Lord's refugees to day? Are you fugitives daily from self and sin? Are you in Christ as in a city of refuge, and is this the sole ground of your security? If so, the strongest consolations are your portion.

II. But, secondly, WE HAVE COME TO "LAY HOLD." Here we have a change of figure, unless we recall the case of Joab, who fled for refuge to the temple and laid hold upon the horns of the altar. We will not insist upon that rare incident, for probably it did not occur to the apostle's mind. Beloved, we feel that we need a refuge, and we find that God has been pleased to set one forth: he says, "Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life." He bids us cease from all hopes of merit, and simply come and believe him and trust in the great work which his well-beloved Son has finished for us. He bids us accept the great plan of Christ's headship on our behalf, and his sacrificial suffering in our room and stead. Justification by faith in Jesus is set before us. What are we to do according to the text? We have to "*lay hold*" upon it. We are not commanded to prepare ourselves for it, or to get what the Romiah writers call "the grace of congruity," by which we should be fit for it, but it is to be laid hold upon by us just as we are. Everybody here knows what it is to lay hold upon a support or a treasure: sinner, that is just what you have to do with Christ! You have to lay hold upon him by faith. You are drowning; there is a rope thrown to you; what have you to do? "*Lay hold.*" You are not to look at your hands to see whether they are clean enough. No, lay hold, dirty hand or clean hand. "*But my hand is weak.*" Lay hold, brother, as best you can, weak hand or not, for while you are laying hold of Christ God is laying hold of you; you may rest assured of that. If you have the faintest grip of Christ, Christ has a firm grip of you such as never shall be relaxed. Your business is at this moment to lay hold and keep hold. God has given us this blessed hope, that those who are in Christ are for Christ's sake forgiven all their iniquities, are accepted and are secure of everlasting life, and of this we have only to lay hold. What does it mean? What is to be done in order to lay hold?

Well, first, we must *believe the gospel to be true*. Do you, all of you, believe it to be true that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them? Yes, I know you believe that God has sent his Son to be a propitiation for sin. So far, so good: the next thing is to *apprehend for yourselves this truth*. Christ justifies believers; he is worthy of trust: trust him, and he has justified you. "*I do not feel it,*" says one. You do not need to feel it.

It is a matter of believing. Believe in Jesus, and because you are a believer be assured that you are saved. "But I thought I should feel," says another. Yes, you shall feel enough by-and-by, but now there is a question between you and God. Is the Lord a liar or not? "He that believeth not hath made God a liar," and on the other hand, "He that believeth on him hath set to his seal that God is true." Which of the two is it to be? God with a solemn oath declares that believers are blessed, being the seed of Abraham, blessed according to his covenant; with an oath he declares that believers shall enter into his rest; with an oath he declares that his Son, the everlasting Melchisedec, is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. What then? Dost thou believe him or not? "Oh," saith one, "I believe God's word, but I doubt its application to myself?" You do not believe it unless you believe it for yourself, for there are no exceptions made in the case. If thou believest, thou art blessed; if thou believest, thou shalt have rest; if thou believest, the great Melchisedec lives for thee and pleads for thee, and thou art saved. If thou believest—there is the point—if thou honourst God by accepting his word as true, and by relying upon Christ for thyself,—then is it well with thee. If thou sayest, "Yes, the rope is a strong one, and I believe it will support a sinking man," why not lay hold upon it? There is the vital point of faith: practically to believe God by resting one's own eternal destiny upon the truth which we say we believe. "Lay hold on the hope."

While a man lays hold upon a thing he goes no further, but *continues to cling to it*. We have fled for refuge, but we flee no further than the hope which we now lay hold upon, namely, eternal life in Christ Jesus. We never wish to get beyond God's promise in Christ Jesus to believers, the promise of salvation to faith. We are satisfied with that, and there we rest. "Laying hold" in the forcible language of the Greek would imply firm retention of that which we have seized. I remember well when first I laid hold on the hope that God had set before me. I was terribly afraid to grasp it, for I thought it was too good to be true: but I saw that there was no other chance for me, and therefore I was driven right out of myself to be bold, and venture all. I knew that I must flee somewhere, and it seemed to be that or nothing; I was forced to believe in the wondrous plan of salvation by another and in another, even in salvation by Jesus Christ. I made a dash at it, and believed it, and joy and peace filled my spirit. That is twenty-seven years ago now, and I am laying hold upon it still. Brethren and sisters, I have not gone an inch beyond the old hope. Jesus Christ was all in all to me then, and he is the same now, only I am more resolved than ever to lean my soul on him and upon him alone. I do profess to you this day I dare not place a shadow of reliance on any sermons I have preached, or any alms I have given, or any prayers I have offered, or any communions with Christ I have enjoyed, or on anything that I have done, or said, or thought: but I rely wholly on what Jesus did, and is doing, as my covenant Head and Surety. I know he bore my sin in his own body on the tree, I know he buried my sin where it never shall have a resurrection, and I know he stands as my representative at the eternal throne, and I also know that I shall soon be where he is; because I am one with him,

since I have believed in him. Now, my friend, if you believe in him too, if it be but five minutes ago that you received faith, you are just as safe in the hand of Jesus as those of us who have been in him for years. If by an act of trust you do but accept what God has set forth, fleeing to it and laying hold upon it, the "strong consolation" of which the text speaks belongs to you. I pray God of his mighty mercy to lead many to believe in him now.

Did you notice that the apostle speaks of *laying hold upon a hope*? This does not mean that we are to lay hold by imagination upon something which we hope to obtain in the dim future, for the next verse goes on to say "which hope we have." We have our hope now, it is not a shadowy idea that possibly when we come to die we may be saved. We know that we at this moment are safe in our refuge, and we lay hold on our confidence as a present joy. Yet that which we lay hold upon is full of hope, there is more in it than we can now see or enjoy. What is the hope? The hope of final perseverance, the hope of ultimate perfection, the hope of eternal glory, the hope of being with our Lord where he is that we may behold his glory for ever—a hope purifying, elevating, and full of glory; a hope which cheers and delights us as often as we think of it. This we have laid hold of by a simple act of faith, believing God to be true. This laying hold upon the hope which God sets before us is a very simple matter, and yet there are some who do not understand it, for they ask us again and again, "What is faith?" Well, it is laying hold, but if you want to know more about it lay hold at once, and see what it is by practice. Lay hold at once, sinner, it is all thou hast to do, and the Spirit of God enables thee to do it. As I said before, black-handed sinner, do not stop to wash thy hands, but lay hold. That which you lay hold on will wash you and cleanse you. And thou, poor, feeble, trembling, paralysed soul, Jesus bids thee stretch out thine hand, and as thou layest hold thou shalt find peace and consolation.

III. For this is our last point, WE ENJOY "STRONG CONSOLATION." I have not time to speak upon this as I should like, and therefore will just throw out a few hints. Many of our fellow-men have no consolation; when trouble comes woe is unto them. There are many others who have a weak consolation; they depend upon the "*absolve is*" of a priest. That must be a very poor thing, I should think, for anybody to get consolation out of—to know that you have been to mass, have confessed, and have been assured of forgiveness by a poor, mortal man who is no better than yourself, except that he has had his head shaved. What ground for consolation poor beings can see in this I cannot tell: it must be a very poor support when sin and Satan assail the soul. Many have a very insufficient consolation, for as soon as trial or trouble arise they faint, and when they have the prospect of death before them their consolation vanishes like the dew in the sun. But *we have a strong consolation*. We call that liquor strong of which a very few drops will flavour all into which it falls: how wonderfully the consolation of Christ has affected our entire lives! There is such potency in it that it sweetens everything about us. It is so strong that it masters all our fears, and slays all our scepticisms. Though there are many teachers badly engaged in suggesting unbelief, yet our strong consolation flings a

thousand doubts aside, as Samson slew a thousand Philistines. It conquers all our trouble too, for it makes us feel that, being called according to the eternal purpose, all things work together for our good: yea, this consolation is so strong that it vanquishes death itself and makes us descend into the chill precincts of the sepulchre without a shiver, joyfully triumphant because Christ has promised as life, God has sworn it, and the promise and the oath must be true.

What I want you to note is that *the consolation of the Christian lies wholly in his God*, because the ground of it is that God has sworn, and that God has promised. Never look, therefore, to yourselves for any consolation; it would be a vain search. Flee from yourselves, and lay hold upon the hope set before you. Oh Christian, you lose consolation when you look away from your God. Fasten the eye of faith on him and never let it glance elsewhere. His promise, his oath, himself, a true and faithful God, this consideration alone can sustain you.

Remember, too, that your consolation must come from *what God has spoken* and not from his providence. Mind that you do not look to the Lord's providential dealings for your springs of joy, for he may chasten you with the rod of men, and beat you with many stripes, but his promise smiles when his providence frowns. See how the apostle dwells upon the promise and the oath as the two immutable things, and not upon temporal blessings. Outward providences change, but the oath never changes, hold you on to that. Your comfort must not even depend upon sensible realizations of God's favour, nor on sweet communions and delights. No, but upon—he has said it and he has sworn it—those are the two strong pillars upon which your comfort must rest. Not upon what you think he says to your heart, nor upon what you may believe you have felt to be applied to your own soul, but upon the bare word, promise, and oath of God without feeling or evidence to back it. God hath said it and sworn it, there is your strong consolation.

Remember, however, that *the power of the strong consolation* derived from the oath of God *must in your personal enjoyment depend very much upon your faith*. What is the consolation of a promise if you do not believe it, and what is the comfort of an oath if you doubt it? It is not the end of all strife to those who believe not. O brother, I charge thee by the veracity of God, labour after an increased faith. If thou never doubtest God till thou hast cause to do so, thou wilt never doubt again. It is impossible for him to lie in anything, and above all in the great things that thy soul rests upon, therefore do not treat him as if he could lie, nor dare to suspect his faithfulness, but hold on to the immutable veracity of God.

Remember that this consolation which is intended to come to you by faith, if you do not get it will prove that you are insulting God. It may appear to be a small and an easy thing to believe God, but it is a horrible and a detestable thing to disbelieve him. Picture some generous friend in this assembly coming before us and saying "I promise such and such a thing." He would be grieved at heart if some one should rise and say, "I am willing enough to believe it, but I cannot." I can hardly think of anything which would be more insulting to an honest man than to have doubt cast upon him by one who pretends to be anxious to believe him. But suppose in great gentleness of spirit the

person so mistrusted were to say, "To put an end to all questioning, engross a deed and I will set my hand and seal to it, and I will at the same time take a solemn oath, calling God to witness that what I promise is true." Now if any person should say, "I still do not believe it," can you conceive the pain of heart, yea, and the indignation which would naturally take possession of our friend's mind! Now God cannot swear by anything greater than himself, for there is no greater, and so he has sworn by himself. By his own existence, by his holiness from which he can never part, by the majesty of his deity, he has solemnly sworn that the believing seed shall be blessed; and blessed they must be. There shall be forgiveness and eternal life to every one that believes in his Son Jesus Christ. This is no fiction. God cannot deceive us on such a point as this, nor indeed, upon any other. This is no dream, no charming myth as some would seem to fancy; it is reality, divine reality. Now then, souls, will you cast yourselves upon this divine reality? May the devil be kept back from you that you may cease blaspheming God by doubting him! May the eternal Spirit now convince you how natural, how proper, how necessary it is that you should at once believe the promise and the oath of God, and trust yourselves with Jesus Christ, whom he sets forth to be a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins this day! I wish I knew how to plead with you; but the time has gone. There was a time with me when to have heard this message would have made my heart leap within me, for I wanted Christ; and when I heard that I must lay hold upon him, and flee to him, and so be saved, I was delighted so to do. Those of you who are as sinful as I was, and as conscious of it, will I trust at this very moment look unto him, and be saved: and if you do, by the promise and the oath of God, you are eternally secure. May God the Holy Ghost lead you to Jesus. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews iii. 7—19;
iv. 6—9; v. 1—11; vi. 13—20.

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On Wednesday, May 2nd, 1877,

By **C. H. SPURGEON.**

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 6TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!"—John xix. 14.

PILATE said much more than he meant, and, therefore, we shall not restrict our consideration of his words to what *he* intended. John tells us considering Caiaphas, "and this spake he not of himself," and we may say the same of Pilate. Everything said or done in connection with the Saviour during the day of his crucifixion was full of meaning, far fuller of meaning than the speakers or actors were aware. Transformed by the cross, even the commonplace becomes solemn and weighty. When Caiaphas said that it was expedient that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not, he little thought that he was enunciating the great gospel principle of substitution. When the Jewish people cried out before Pilate "His blood be on us and on our children," they little knew the judgment which they were bringing upon themselves, which would commence to be fulfilled at the siege of Jerusalem, and follow them, hanging like a heavy cloud over their race, for centuries. When the soldier with a spear pierced his side he had no idea that he was bringing forth before all eyes that blood and water which are to the whole church the emblems of the double cleansing which we find in Jesus, cleansing by atoning blood and sanctifying grace. The fulness of time had come, and all things were full. Each movement on that awful day was brimming with mystery, neither could the Master or those around him stir or speak without teaching some gospel, or enforcing some lesson. Whereas on certain days frivolity seems to rule the hour, and little is to be gathered from much that is spoken; on the day of the passion even the most careless spake as men inspired. Pilate, the undecided spirit, with no mind of his own, uttered language as weighty as if he too had been among the prophets. His acquittal of our Lord, his mention of Barabbas, his writing of the inscription to be fixed over the head of Jesus, and many other matters, were all fraught with instruction.

No. 1,853.

It was to the Jews that Pilate brought forth Jesus arrayed in garments of derision, and to them he said, "*Ecce rex*"—"Behold your King!" It was by the seed of Abraham that he was rejected as their King; but we shall not think of them in order to blame that unhappy nation, but to remind ourselves that we also may fall into the same sin. As a nation favoured with the gospel we stand in many respects in the same privileged condition as the Jews did. To us is the word of God made known, to our keeping the oracles of God are committed in these last days, and we, though by nature shoots of the wild olive, are engrafted into that favoured stock from which Israel have for a while been cut off. Shall we prove equally unworthy? Shall any of us be found guilty of the blood of Jesus? We hear of Jesus this day; are we rejecting him? The suffering Messiah will be brought forth again this morning, not by Pilate, but by one who longs to do him honour, and when he stands before you, and is proclaimed again in the words, "Behold your King!" will you also cry, "Away with him, away with him"? Let us hope that there will not be found here hearts so evil as to imitate the rebellious nation and cry, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Oh that each one of us may acknowledge the Lord Jesus to be his King, for beneath his sceptre there is rest and joy. He is worthy to be crowned by every heart, let us all unite in beholding him with reverence and receiving him with delight. Give me your ears and hearts while Jesus is evidently set forth as standing among you, and for the next few minutes let it be your only business to "Behold your King."

I. Come with me, then, to the place which is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew Gabbatha, and there "behold your King." I shall first ask you to BEHOLD YOUR KING PREPARING HIS THRONE, yea, and making himself ready to sit thereon. When you look in answer to the summons, "Behold your King," what do you see? You see the "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," wearing a crown of thorns and covered with an old purple cloak, which had been thrown about him in mockery; you can see, if you look narrowly, the traces of his streaming blood, for he has just been scourged, and you may also discover that his face is blackened with bruises and stained with shameful spittle from the soldiers' mouths.

"Thus trimmed forth they bring him to the rout,
Who 'Crucify him' cry with one strong shout,
God holds his peace at man, and man cries out."

It is a terrible spectacle, but I ask you to gaze upon it steadily and see the establishment of the Redeemer's throne. See how he becomes your mediatorial King. He was setting up a new throne on Gabbatha, whereon he would reign as the King of pardoned sinners and the Prince of Peace. He was King before all worlds as Lord of all by right of his eternal power and Godhead; he had a throne when worlds were made, as King of all kings by creation; he had also always filled the throne of providence, upholding all things by the word of his power. On his head were many crowns, and to Pilate's question, "Art thou a king then?" he did fitly answer, "Thou sayest that I am a king." But here before Pilate and the Jews, in his condition of shame and misery, he was about to ascend, and first of all to prepare the throne of the heavenly grace, which

now is set up among the sons of men, that they may flee to it and find eternal salvation. Mark how he is preparing this throne of grace, it is *by pain and shame endured in our room and stead*. Sin was in the way of man's happiness, and a broken law, and justice requiring a penalty: and all this must be arranged before a throne of grace could be erected among men. If you look at our suffering Lord you see at once the ensigns of his *pain*, for he wears a crown of thorns which pierce his brow. Pain was a great part of the penalty due for sin, and the great Substitute was therefore sorely pained. When Pilate brought forth our martyr Prince he was the very mirror of agony, he was majesty in misery, misery wrought up to its full height and stature. The cruel furrows of the scourge, and the trickling rivulets of his blood adown his face were but the tokens that he was about to die in cruel pangs upon the cross, and these together were incumbent upon him because there could be no throne of grace till first there had been a substitutionary sacrifice. It behoved him to suffer that he might be a prince and a Saviour. Behold your King in his pains, he is laying the deep foundations of his kingdom of mercy. Many a crown has been secured by blood, and so is this, but it is his own blood; many a throne has been established by suffering, and so is this, but he himself bears the pain. By his great sacrificial griefs our Lord has prepared a throne whereon he shall sit till all the chosen race have been made kings and priests to reign with him. It is by his agony that he obtains the royal power to pardon: by his stripes and bruises he wins the right to absolve poor sinners. We shall have no cause to wonder at the greatness of his mediatorial power if we consider the depth of his sacrificial sufferings: as his misery is the source of his majesty, so the greatness of his pains has secured to him the fulness of power to save. Had he not gone to the end of the law, and honoured justice to the highest degree, he had not now been so gloriously able to dispense mercy from his glorious high throne of mediatorial grace. Behold your King, then, as he lays deep in his own pain and death the basis of his throne of grace.

Nor is it only pain, for he wears also the tokens of *scorn*. That crown of thorns meant mainly mockery: the soldiers made him a mimic monarch, a carnival king, and that scarlet robe, too, was cast upon his shoulders in bitter scorn: thus did this world deride its God. The evangelists give you the description in brief sentences, as if they stopped between each line to cover their faces with their hands and weep. So there he stands before the crowd, helpless, friendless, with none to declare his generation or give him a good word. He is deserted by all who formerly called him Master, and he has become the centre of a scene of rioting and ridicule. The soldiers have done their worst, and now the chief men of the nation look at him with contempt, and are only kept back from the most ribald scorn by a hate too furiously eager for death to afford them leisure for their scoffs. His enemies had done everything in their power to clothe him with scorn, and they were asking for permission to do more, for they cried, "Let him be crucified." Behold ye, how he has left all the honour of his Father's house, and his own glory among the angels, and here he stands with a mock robe, a mimic sceptre, and a thorny crown, the butt of ridicule, scoffed at by all! Yet this must be, because sin is a shameful thing, and a part of

the penalty of sin is shame, as they will know who shall wake up in the day of judgment to everlasting contempt. Shame fell on Adam when he sinned, and then and there he knew that he was naked; and now shame has come down in a tremendous hail upon the head of the Second Adam, the substitute for shameful man, and he is covered with contempt. "All they that see me laugh me to scorn." It is hard to say whether cruelty or mockery had most to do with the person of our Lord at Gabbatha; but by enduring these two things together he laid on an immovable foundation the corner stone of his dominion of love and grace. How could he have been the king of a redeemed people if he had not thus redeemed them? He might have been lord over a people doomed to die, the stern ruler of a people who continued in sin, and would so continue till they perished for ever from his presence; but no such a kingdom did he seek; he sought a kingdom over hearts that should eternally be under obligation to him, hearts that, being redeemed from the lowest hell by his atoning death, would for ever love him with the utmost fervency. His sorrow secured his power to save, his shame endowed him with the right to bless.

"Behold your King." Look at him with steady eye and see what a King he now is *by right of benefit conferred*. Behold, he hath put away sin for ever by the sacrifice of himself, and therefore all the ransomed ones agree that he should be king who smote the great dragon which devoured the nations. Behold by his stooping to shame he hath dethroned Satan, who was the prince of this world; and who should occupy the throne but he who has won it, and cast out the strong one who ruled aforetime. Christ has done more for men than the prince of darkness could or would, for he has died for them, and so he has earned a just supremacy over all grateful hearts. As for death, Jesus, by yielding to death, has conquered it. Let him be crowned with the victor's wreath who has destroyed the world's destroyer. In his shame you also see the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilling the law and making it honourable. He who could honour that law, which else would have cursed us, deserveth to have all honour and homage paid to him by the sons of men, whom he has rescued from the curse. You see, then, our Lord, when he put on the old red cloak, and submitted his brows to be environed with thorns, was really establishing for himself an empire the foundations of which shall never be shaken: he was performing that saving work which has made him king among sinners whom he saves, and Lord of the kingdom of grace, which through his death is bestowed upon men.

Note this, too, that men are kings among their fellows when they can show *deep sympathy, and give substantial succour*. He who can sympathise wins power of the best sort, not coarse force, but refined spiritual influence. For this cause our Lord was afflicted, as you see him afflicted, that he might have sympathy with you in your direst grief, and in your most grievous dishonour. As the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself also took part of the same, and as they must suffer, so the Captain of their salvation was made perfect by suffering. This gives him his glorious power over us. He is a faithful high priest, for he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and this ability to enter into our infirmities and sorrows makes him supreme

in our hearts. Look at your King in pain and mockery, and see how royal he is to your heart! How sovereignly he commands your heart to rejoice. With what regal power he commands your fears to lie still, and how obediently your despondency yields to his word. Now, as it is with you, so is it on a larger scale in the world. The suffering nations will yet see their true deliverer in their suffering Lord. That sceptre of a reed will secure him power far greater than a rod of iron. His love to man is proved by his suffering to the death on their behalf, and this, when the Holy Ghost hath made men wise, shall be to the myriads of our race the reason for proclaiming him Lord of all. The kings and princes who rule mankind by reason of their descent or by the force of arms have but the names of kings, the true kings are the great benefactors. The heroes are our kings after all. We look upon those as royal who can risk their lives for their fellow men, to win them liberty, or to teach them truth. The race forgets its masters, but it remembers its friends. Earth, but for Jesus, had been a vast prison, and men a race of condemned criminals, but he who stands before us in Gabbatha, in all his shame and grief, hath delivered us from our lost estate, and therefore he must be King. Who shall say him nay? If love must ultimately triumph; if disinterested self-sacrifice must obtain homage, then Jesus is and shall be King. If eventually when the morning breaketh and man's heart is purged from the prejudice and injustice occasioned by sin, the might shall be with the right, and truth must prevail; then Jesus must reign. The eternal fitness of things demands that the best should be highest, that he who does men most service should be most honoured among them; in a word, that he who was made nothing of for man's sake should become everything to him. See you, then, how the crown of thorns is mother to the crown which Jesus wears in his church! The scarlet robe is the purchase price of the vesture of universal sovereignty, and the mock sceptre of reed is the precursor of the rod of nations wherewith the whole earth will yet be ruled. "Behold your King," and see the sources of his mediatorial power.

II. O you who see in your bleeding and rejected Lord "the King in his beauty," come ye hither yet again and BEHOLD HIM CLAIMING YOUR HOMAGE. See in what way he comes to win your hearts. What is his right to be King over you? There are many rights, for on his head are many crowns, but the most commanding right which Jesus has over any of us is signified by that crown of thorns: it is *the right of supreme love*: he loved us as none other could have loved. If we put all the loves of parents and of wives and children all together, we can never rival even for a moment the love of Christ to us, and whenever that love touches us, so that we feel its power, we crown him King directly. Who can resist his charms? One look of his eyes overpowers us. See with your heart those eyes when they are full of tears for perishing sinners, and you are a willing subject. One look at his blessed person subjected to scourging and spitting for our sakes will give us more idea of his crown rights than anything besides. Look into his pierced heart as it pours out its life-flood for us, and all disputes about his sovereignty are ended in our hearts. We own him Lord because we see how he loved. How could we do otherwise? Love in

action, or rather love suffering, carries an omnipotence about it. Behold what his love endured, and so "Behold your King."

Jesus in the garb of mockery, marred with traces of his pain, also reminds us of *his complete purchase* of us by his deeds and death. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." Behold your King, and see the price. It is the price of suffering immense, of shame most cruel. It is an incalculable price, for the Lord of all is set at nought. It is an awful price, for he who only hath immortality yields himself to die. It is the price of blood. It is the scourging and bleeding and woe of Jesus; nay, it is himself. If you would see the price of your redemption, "Behold your King." 'Tis he that hath redeemed us unto God by his blood, he that "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." You own that claim, the love of Christ constraineth you; you feel that henceforth you live for him alone, and count it joy that in all respects he should reign over you with unlimited sway.

Jesus, because he suffered, hath acquired a power over us which is far superior to any which could be urged in courts of law, or enforced by mere power, for our hearts have voluntarily surrendered to him and given him *the right of our free submission*, charmed to own allegiance to such imperial love. Is it possible for a believer to look at the Lord Jesus Christ without feeling that he longs to be more and more his servant and disciple? Do you not thirst to serve him? Can you behold him in the depth of shame without pining to lift him up to the heights of glory? Can you see him stooping thus for you without pleading with God that a glorious high throne may be his, and that he may sit upon it and rule all the hearts of men? There is no need to argue out the right of King Jesus, for you feel it; his love has carried you by storm, and it holds fast its capture. You cannot have a Saviour without his being your King, and seeing such a Saviour in such a condition, you cannot even think of him without delighting to ascribe to him all power and dominion. Could we escape his sway it would be bondage to us, and when we at any time fail to own it, it is our worst affliction.

"Behold your King," then, for he himself is his own claim to your obedience. See what he suffered for you, my brethren, and henceforth never draw back from any labour, shame, or suffering for his dear sake. "Behold your King," and reckon to be treated like him. Do you expect to be crowned with gold where he was crowned with thorns? Shall lilies grow for you and briars for him? Never again be ashamed to own his glorious name, unless indeed you can be so vile as to prove a traitor to such a Lord. See to what shame he was put, and learn from him to despise all shame for his truth's sake. Shall the disciple be above his master, or the servant above his lord? If they have thus maltreated the master of the house, what shall they do to the household? Let us reckon upon our share of this treatment, and by accepting it prove to all men that the despised and rejected of men is really the King over us, and that the subjects blush not to be like their monarch. Even though the cost be all the shame the world can possibly pour

us, or all the suffering that flesh and blood can in any condition be, let us be faithful in our loyalty, and cry, "Who shall separate

Shall persecution, or distress, or tribulation divide us from our God? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors. King of griefs, thou art King of my soul! O King of shame, thou art absolute monarch of my heart. Thou art King by right divine, and God by mine own voluntary choice. Other lords have had dominion over us, but now, since thou hast revealed thyself after this fashion, thou art only shall govern our spirit." Do you not see, then, that Jesus as Pilate reveals his claim in the appearance which he wears. "Behold your King."

II. "Behold your King," for a third time, that you may see him **DURING HIS DOMINIONS**. Dressed in robes of scorn, and with a visage marked with pain, he comes forth conquering and to conquer. This is very apparent at a superficial glance, for he is not arrayed like a man of war. You see no sword upon his thigh, nor bow in his hand. No threatening falls from his lips, nor does he speak with eloquent passion. He is unarmed, yet victorious; is silent, but yet conquering. In this garb he goeth forth to war. His shame is his armour, and sufferings are his battle axe. How say you? How can it be so? Speak no fiction, but sober fact, and it shall be proved.

Missionaries have gone forth to win the heathen for Christ, and they have commenced with the uncivilized sons of sin by telling them that there is a God, and that he is great and just: the people have listened unmoved, and have only answered, "Dost thou think we know not this?" Then they have spoken of sin and its punishment, and have foretold the coming of the Lord to judgment, but still the people stirred not, but coolly said, "It is true," and then went on their way to live in sin as before. At last the earnest men have let fall the blessed secret, and spoken of the love of God in giving his only begotten Son, and they have begun to tell the story of the matchless griefs of Immanuel. Then have the dry bones begun to hear. They tell us that they had long told the story before they noticed that eyes were fastened on them, and that countenances were beaming with interest which had been listless before, and they have said to themselves, "Why did we not begin with this?" Ay, why indeed? for this it is that touches men's hearts. Christ crucified is the conqueror. Not in his robes of glory does he subdue the heart, but in his vestments of shame. Not as sitting on the throne does he at first gain the faith and the affections of sinners, but as bleeding, suffering, and dying in their stead. "God forbid that I should glory," said the apostle, "save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and though every theme that is connected with the Saviour is fit to play its part in our ministry, yet this is the master theme. The atoning work of Jesus is the great gun of our battery. The cross is the mighty battering-ram wherewith to break in pieces the brazen gates of human prejudices and the iron bars of obstinacy. Christ coming to be our judge alarms, but Christ the man of sorrows subdues. The crown of thorns has a royal power in it to compel a willing allegiance, the sceptre of reed breaks hearts better than a rod of iron, and the robe of mockery commands more love than Cæsar's imperial purple. There is nothing like it under heaven. Victories ten thousand times ten thousand

have been achieved by him whom Pilate led forth to the multitude,—victories distinctly to be ascribed to the thorny crown and vesture of mockery, are they not written in the book of the wars of the Lord? There will be more such as he is more frequently set forth in his own fashion, and men are bidden in the Man of sorrows to behold their King.

Has it not been so *at home* as well as among the far-off heathen? What winneth men's hearts to Christ to-day? What but Christ in shame and Christ in suffering? I appeal to you who have been newly converted; what has bound you as captives to Jesus' chariot? What has made you henceforth vow to be his followers, rejoicing in his name? What but this, that he bowed his head to the death for your sake and hath redeemed you unto God by his blood? You know it is so.

And oh, dear *children of God*, if ever you feel the power of Christ upon you to the full, till it utterly overcomes you, is it not the memory of redeeming grief which doeth it? When you become like harps, and Jesus is the minstrel and layeth his finger amongst your heart-strings and bringeth out nothing but praise for his dear name, what is it that charms you into the music of grateful love but the fact of his condescension on your behalf? Is not this your song, that he was slain and hath redeemed you unto God by his blood? I confess I could sit me down at his cross' foot and do nothing else but weep until I wept myself away, for his sufferings make my soul to melt within me. Then if the call of duty is heard I feel intensely eager to plead with others, ready to make any sacrifice to bring others under my Lord's dominion, and full of a holy passion that even death could not quench—all this, I say, if I have but just come from gazing on the Redeemer's passion, and drinking of his cup and being baptized with his baptism. The sceptre of reed rules as nothing else ever did, for it rouses enthusiasm. The thorn-crown commands homage as no other diadem ever did, for it braces men into heroes and martyrs. No royalty is so all-commanding as that which has for its insignia the chaplet of thorn, the reed, the red cloak, and the five wounds. Other sovereignties are forced, and feigned, and hollow compared with the sovereignty of "the despised of men": fear, or custom, or self-interest make men courtiers elsewhere, but fervent love crowds the courts of King Jesus. We do not merely say that the marred countenance is the most majestic ever seen, but we have felt it to be so on many an occasion, yea, and feel it to be so now. Do you want to make our hard hearts soft? Tell us of Jesus' grief. Would you make us, strong men, into children? Set the Man of sorrows in our midst; there is no resisting him.

Look ye also at *backsliders* if ye would see the power of the despised Nazarene. If they have gone away from Christ, if they have become lukewarm, if their hearts have become obdurate to him who once could charm them, what can bring them back? I know but one magnet which in the hands of the Holy Spirit will attract these sadly fallen ones: it is Jesus in his shame and pains. We tell them that they crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame, and they look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn for him. O ye that after having sipped of the communion cup have gone to drink at the table of Bacchus, ye who after having talked of love to Christ have followed

after the lusts of the flesh, ye who after singing his praises have blasphemed the sacred name with which ye are named—may his omnipotence of love be proved in you also. What can ever bring you back but this sad reflection, that ye also have twisted for him a crown of thorns and caused him to be blasphemed among his enemies? Still the merit of his death is available for you: the power and efficacy of his precious blood have not ceased even for you, and if you come back to him—and oh, may a sight of him draw you—he will receive you graciously as : t the first. I say to you, “Behold your King,” and may the sovereignty of his humiliation and suffering be proved this morning in some of you as you shall come bending at his feet, conquered by his great love and restored to repentance and faith by his marvellous compassion. A sight of his wounds and bruises heals us, so that we grieve at our rebellions and long to be brought home to God, never to wander more.

Ah, dear brethren, we shall always find, as long as the world standeth, that among saints, sinners, backsliders, and all classes of men Jesus Christ's power is most surely felt when his humiliation is most faithfully declared and most believingly known. It is by this that he will subdue all things to himself. If we will but preach Jesus Christ to the Hindoo it will not be necessary to answer all his metaphysical subtleties—the sorrows of Jesus are as a sharp sword to cut the Gordian knot. If we will go down amongst the degraded inhabitants of Africa we shall not need first to civilize them; the cross is the great lever which lifts up fallen men: it conquers evil and establishes truth and righteousness. The most depraved and hardened learn his great love, and hearts of stone begin to beat; they see Jesus suffering to the death out of nothing else but love to them, and they are touched by it, and eagerly enquire what they must do to be saved by such a Saviour. The Holy Spirit worketh in the minds of many by setting forth the great love and grief of Jesus. May we who are his ministers have great faith in his cross, and henceforth say, as we preach the suffering Jesus, “Behold your King.”

IV. In the fourth place I beg you to “Behold your King” SETTING FORTH THE PATTERN OF HIS KINGDOM. When you look at him you are struck at once with the thought that if he be a king he is like no other monarch, for other kings are covered with rich apparel and surrounded with pomp, but he has none of these. Their glories usually consist in wars by which they have made others suffer, but his glory is his own suffering; no blood but his own has flowed to make him illustrious. He is a king, but he cannot be put in the list of sovereigns such as the nations of the earth are compelled to serve. When Antoninus Pius set up the statue of Jesus in the Pantheon as one of a circle of gods and heroes, it must have seemed strangely out of place to those who gazed upon its visage if the sculptor was at all true to life. It must have stood apart as one that could not be numbered with the rest. Neither can you set him among the masters of the human race who have crushed mankind beneath their iron heel. He was no Cæsar; you cannot make him appear like one: call him not autocrat, emperor, or czar,—he has an authority greater than all these, yet not after their kind. His purple is different from theirs, and his crown also, but his face differs more, and his heart most of all. “My

kingdom," saith he, "is not of this world." For troops he has a host of sorrows, for pomp a surrounding of scorn, for lofty bearing humility, for adulation mockery, for homage spitting, for glory shame, for a throne a cross. Yet was there never truer king, indeed all kings are but a name, save this King, who is a real ruler in himself and of himself, and not by extraneous force. Right royal indeed is the Nazarene, but he cannot be likened unto the princes of earth, nor can his kingdom be reckoned with theirs. I pray that the day may soon come when none may dream of looking upon the church as a worldly organization capable of alliance with temporal sovereignties so as to be patronized, directed, or reformed by them. Christ's kingdom shines as a lone star with a brightness all its own. It standeth apart like a hill of light, sacred and sublime: the high hills may leap with envy because of it, but it is not of them nor like unto them. Is not this manifest even in the appearance of our Lord as Pilate brings him forth and cries, "Behold your King!"?

Now as he sets before us in his own person the pattern of his kingdom, we may expect that we shall see some likeness to him in his subjects; and if you will gaze upon the church, which is his kingdom from the first day of her history until now, you will see that it too is wearing its purple robe. The martyrs' blood is the purple vesture of the church of Christ; the trials and persecutions of believers are her crown of thorns. Think of the rage of persecution under Pagan Rome, and the equally inhuman proceedings of Papal Rome, and you will see how the ensign of Christ's kingdom is a crown of thorns; a crown and yet thorns, thorns but still a crown. The bush is burning, but it is not consumed. If you, beloved, are truly followers of Jesus, you must expect to take your measure of shame and dishonour, and you may reckon upon your allotment of griefs and sorrows. The "Man of sorrows" attracts a sorrowful following. The lamb of God's passover is still eaten with bitter herbs. The child of God cannot escape the rod, for the elder brother did not, and to him we are to be conformed. We must "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ for his body's sake, which is the church" (Colossians i. 24).

Recollect, however, that Christ's sufferings as a pattern were not for his own sins, nor brought upon him as a chastisement for his own faults, so that the sufferings which belong to his kingdom are those which are endured for his name and for his glory's sake, and for the good of others. If men lie in prison for their own crimes, that has nothing to do with his kingdom; if we suffer for our sins, that is no part of his kingdom; but when a man loseth of his substance for Christ's cause, layeth out himself to toil even unto death, beareth contempt and suffers hardness as a Christian—this is after the type of Christ's kingdom. When the missionary goeth forth with his life in his hand among the heathen, or when a believer in any way divesteth himself of comfort for the good of others, it is then that he truly copies the pattern set him in Pilate's hall by our great King. I say to you Christians who court ease, to you who are hoarding up your gold, to you who will do nothing that would bring you under the criticism of your fellow men, to you who live unto yourselves,—would it not be irony of the severest kind if I were to point to Jesus before

Pilate and say, "Behold your King." Living in undue luxury, amassing wealth, rolling in ease, living to enjoy yourselves! Is that your King? Poor subjects you, and very unlike your Lord; but if there be among us those who for his sake can make sacrifices, we may look upon our King without fear. You who are undaunted by contempt, and who would give all that you have, yea, and give yourselves to know Jesus, and are doing so, to such I say, "Behold your King," for you are of his kingdom and you shall reign with him. In your conquest of yourselves you have already become kings. In reigning over your own desires and carnal inclinations, for the sake of his dear love, you are already kings and priests unto God, and you shall reign for ever and ever. He who is ruled by his passions in any degree is still a slave, but he who lives for God and his fellow men hath a royal soul. The insignia of a prince unto God are still shame and suffering: which adornments are readily worn when the Lord calls him so to do. In Christ's kingdom those are peers of the highest rank who are most like their Lord and are the lowest and humblest in mind, and most truly the servants of all. The secondary princes of his kingdom approximate less closely to him, and the lower you descend in the scale the less you are like him in those respects. The Christian surrounded with every comfort, who never endured hardness for Christ, who never knew what it was to be sneered at for Jesus' sake, who never made a sacrifice which went so far as to pinch him in the least, he, if indeed he be a Christian, is least in the kingdom of heaven. Proud, rich men who give but trifles to Christ's cause are pariahs in his kingdom, but they are the chief who are willing to be least of all, they are princes who make themselves the offscouring of all things for his name's sake, such as were the apostles and first martyrs, and others whom his love has greatly constrained.

V. Our concluding remark shall be, "Behold your King"—PROVING THE CERTAINTY OF HIS EMPIRE,—for if, beloved, Christ was King when he was in Pilate's hands, after being scourged and spit upon, and while he was wearing the robe and crown of mockery, when will he not be King? If he was King at his worst, when is it that his throne can ever be shaken? They have brought him very low, they have brought him lower than the sons of men, for they have made him a worm and no man, despised of the people, *and yet he is King!* Marks of royalty were present on the day of his death. He dispensed crowns when he was on the cross,—he gave the dying thief a promise of an entrance into Paradise. In his death he shook the earth, he opened the graves, he rent the rocks, he darkened the sun, and he made men smite on their breasts in dismay. One voice after another, even from the ranks of his foes, proclaimed him to be King, even when dying like a malefactor. Was he a King then? When will he not be King? and who is there that can by any means shake his throne? In the days of his flesh "the Kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together, saying, Let us break his bonds asunder, and cast his cords from us"; but he that sat in the heavens did laugh, the Lord did have them in derision, and Christ on the cross was acknowledged, in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, to be still the King of the Jews. When will he not be King? If he was King before he died and was laid in the grave, what is he now that he has risen from the dead, now that he has

vanquished the destroyer of our race, and lives no more to die? What is he now? Ye angels, tell what glories surround him now! If he was King when he stood at Pilate's bar, what will he be when Pilate shall stand at his bar, when he shall come on the great white throne and summon all mankind before him to judgment? What will be his acknowledged sovereignty and his dreaded majesty in the day of the Lord? Come, let us adore him; let us pay our humble homage in the courts of the Lord's house this day; and then let us go forth to our daily service in his name, and make this our strong resolve, his Spirit helping us, that we will live to crown him in our hearts and in our lives, in every place where our lot may be cast, till the day break and the shadows flee away, and we behold the King in his beauty and the land that is very far off. None can overturn a kingdom which is founded on the death of its King; none can abolish a dominion whose deep foundations are laid in the tears and blood of the Prince himself. Napoleon said that he founded his empire by force, and therefore it had passed away; but, said he, "Jesus founded his kingdom upon love, and it will last for ever." So it must be, for whatever may or may not be, it is written—"*He must reign.*"

As for us, if we wish to extend the Redeemer's kingdom we must be prepared to deny ourselves for Christ, we must be prepared for weariness, slander, and self-denial. In this sign we conquer. The cross will have to be borne by us as well as by him if we are to reign with Jesus. We must both teach the cross and bear the cross. We must participate in the shame if we would participate in the glory. No thorn no throne. When again shall be heard the voice, "Behold your King," and Jew and Gentile shall see him enthroned, and surrounded with all his Father's angels, with the whole earth subdued to his power, happy shall he be who shall then in the exalted Saviour behold his King. The Lord grant us this day to be loyal subjects of the Crucified that we may be favoured to share his glory.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xix. 1—30.

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ALL THINGS ARE READY. COME.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 13TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Come, for all things are now ready."—Luke xiv. 17.

THIS invitation was first of all made to the Jews, but it seems to me to have a peculiar appropriateness to ourselves. It is later in the day than when first the Lord was here, and therefore the supper time is evidently closer at hand. The shadows lengthen, the sun of the present dispensation is nearing its setting; by nearly nineteen hundred years has its day been shortened since first the Lord sent forth his servants at supper time. The fulness of time for the marriage supper of the Lamb must speedily arrive, and therefore it behoves us to be more than ever earnest in delivering the message to the invited guests.

And if all things could be said to be ready even in our Saviour's day, we may say it with still greater emphasis now; for when he delivered this parable the Holy Spirit was not yet given, but Pentecost has now passed, and the Spirit of God abideth with us to accompany the word, to fill it with power and to bless our souls as we feed upon the truth. Very emphatically then at this time all things are now ready, and the supper awaits the guests. I pray you do not begin to make excuses, but be prepared to follow us when we bid you come, to go with us when we seek to bring you in, or at least to yield to our entreaties when with all the sacred violence of love we would compel you to come in. We will not grudge the use of all the three increasing modes of persuasion so long as you are but led to "Come, for all things are now ready."

There are two things clearly in the text, and these have a close relation to one another. A plain invitation—"Come," and then a forcible argument—"for all things are ready." The argument is fetched from the divine preparations, gathered from among the dainty viands of the royal feast. "My oxen and my fatlings are killed, come to the supper." The readiness of everything on God's part is the argument why men should come and partake of his grace: and that is the point upon which

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we will dwell at this time—the readiness of the feast of mercy is the reason why men should come to it at once.

I. We will begin our meditation by laying down the first statement which shall make our first division of discourse, namely, that IT IS GOD'S HABIT TO HAVE ALL THINGS READY, whether for his guests or his creatures. You never discover him to be behindhand in anything. When the guests come there is not a scramble to get the table arranged and the food prepared, but the Lord has great forethought, and every little point of detail is well arranged. "All things are ready."

It was so in creation. He did not create a single blade of grass upon the face of the earth until the soil and the atmosphere had been prepared for it, and until the kindly sun had learned to look down upon the earth. Imagine vegetation without a sun, or without the alternation of day and night. But the air was full of light, the firmament upheld the clouds, and the dry land had appeared from out of the sea, and then all things were ready for herb, and plant, and tree. Nor did God prepare one single creature that hath life, nor fowl that fly in the midst of heaven, nor fish that swim the seas, nor beast that moveth on the dry land, until he had prepared its *habitat*, and made ready its appointed food. There were no cattle before there were meadows for their grazing; no birds till there were trees for their nests, no, nor even a creeping insect till its portion of meat had been provided. No creature had to wait in hungry mood while its food was growing; all things were ready: ready first for vegetation, and then afterwards for animal life. As for Adam, when God came to make him as his last and noblest work of creation, all things were ready. The garden was laid out upon the banks of flowing streams, and planted with all kinds of trees, the fruits were ripe for his diet, and the flowers in bloom for his delight. He did not come to an unfurnished house, but he entered upon a home which his Father had made pleasant and agreeable for his dwelling. The world was first fitted up, and then the man who was to govern that world was placed in it. "All things are ready," the Lord seems to say, "Spring up, O herb yielding seed"; and then "All things are ready, come forth ye roes and hinds of the field!" and then "All things are ready, stand forth, O man, made in mine own image!"

In after times we may gather illustrations of the same truth from the ways of God with men. The ark was first of all builded, and the various creatures were gathered into it, with all their necessary provender, for that strange voyage which they were about to take: and then the Lord said to Noah, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark," "All things are ready, come," was his voice to the chosen eight as they entered into the ark. There was no need to tarry any longer, every preparation was made, and therefore God shut them in. Everything is done with punctuality and exactness by the only wise God. The selfsame day that a thing is needed it is prepared.

Take another event in providence, such as the going down of Israel into Egypt. God had determined that Jacob and his seed should sojourn awhile in the land of Ham, but how wisely he prepared the whole matter. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, and Joseph was there upon the throne clothed with power to nourish them through the famine. He had been there years before, all in good time to store the wheat

while the seven years of plenty lasted, that they might be well fed during the seven years of famine. Goshen also was at the disposal of Joseph, so that the flocks and herds of Israel might dwell in that fat land. Not into Egypt shall God's Israel go till all things are ready; and when all things are ready they will come out again with a high hand and an outstretched arm.

So was it when the tribes migrated into Canaan itself. God took them not to the promised land until all things were ready. They were made to wait for the fitting time, for the Lord said "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Not till the inhabitants of the land had passed the bounds of mercy, and were condemned to die, were the Israelites brought upon the scene to be at once their executioners and successors; and when the tribes came to the river Jordan, God had prepared everything for them, for he had sent the hornet before them to drive out the people, and a pestilence also, for the spies said, "It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof." The Lord God had gone before them to fight their battles before they came, and to prepare a place for them, so that when they entered they dwelt in houses which they had not built, and they gathered the fruit of olives which they had not planted. They came to a land that flowed with milk and honey, a land in a fine cultivated condition, and not a wilderness which with hard labour must be reclaimed. Israel came to a country which was as the garden of the Lord, whose fruit might at once be enjoyed, for they ate of the old corn of the land almost as soon as they passed the Jordan. So you see "All things are ready" is a proclamation which the Lord has often in spirit made to those whom he chooses to bless.

Now the fact that in the great gospel supper all things are ready teaches us first, that *God's thoughts go before men's comings*. "Come, for all things are ready." Not "If you come, all things will be ready," but "they are ready, and therefore come." Grace is first, and man at his best follows its footsteps. Long before we ever thought of God he thought of us; yea, before we had a being and ere time itself began, in the bosom of the Eternal there were thoughts of love towards those for whom the table of his mercy is now spread. He had planned and arranged everything in his august mind from of old, he had indeed foreknown and predestinated all the provisions and all the guests of his supper; all things were settled in his eternal covenant and purpose or ever the earth was. Never think, oh sinner, that thou canst outstrip the love of God, it is at the end of the race before thou art at the beginning. God hath completed before thou hast begun. His thoughts are before ours, and *so are his acts*, for he doth not say, "All things are planned and arranged," but "All things are ready." Jesus, the great sacrifice, is slain, the fountain for our cleansing is filled with blood: the Holy Spirit has been given, the word by which we are to be instructed is in our hands, and the light which will illuminate that sacred page is promised us through the Holy Ghost. Things promised ought to encourage us to come to Christ, but things already given ought to be irresistible attractions. All things are already completed by the sacred Trinity before we come to cry for mercy; this should make us very hopeful and eager in our approaches to the Lord. Come, sinner;

come at once: this ought to encourage thee, since all that God has to do in thy salvation is done before thou hast a thought of him or turnest one foot towards his abode. All things are ready. Come!

This also proves how welcome those are who come. If you are invited to see a friend, and when you reach the place you find the door fast, and after knocking many times no one answers, for there is no one at home, you reckon that there is some mistake, or that the invitation was not a sincere one. Even if your host should come to the door and admit you, but should evidently be embarrassed, for there is no meal provided, and he has made no arrangements for your rest at night, you soon detect it, and like a wise man you quickly move off somewhere else, for if you had been welcome, things would have been prepared for you. But oh, poor soul, if thou comest to God all things are ready for thine entertainment.

"Spread for thee the festal board,
With his richest dainties stored."

The couch of rest and quietness is prepared for thee. All things are ready. How freely doth Jehovah welcome thee, how genuine is the invitation, how sincere the desire that thou shouldst come to feast with him.

So much upon our first remark, it is the habit of the Lord to have all things ready for his guests.

II. Our second statement is that **THIS READINESS SHOULD BE AN ARGUMENT THAT HIS SAINTS SHOULD COME** continually to him and find grace to help in every time of need. O children of God, I will lift the parable away from the immediate use which the Saviour made of it to employ it for your good. You know, beloved, that whenever the Lord Jesus Christ invites his people to come to him, and to taste of his bounty, all things are ready. It was a beautiful scene by the sea of Tiberias when the Lord spake to those who had been toiling on the lake at fishing, and said to them, "Come and dine." They were willing enough to dine, but they were busy dragging to the shore those great fishes. Remember, when they did land, they found the invitation to be no vain one, for it is written, "They saw a fire of coals there and fish laid thereon, and bread." How the coals came there, and the fish, and the bread, the evangelist does not tell us, but our Lord would not have asked them to dinner if he had not been able to give them a warm reception; there was the fire of coals, and the fish laid thereon and bread. Whenever therefore your Lord and Master, by his blessed Spirit, calls you to come near to him, you may be quite sure that all things are ready for your immediate enjoyment: you need never pause or hesitate, but approach him without delay. I want to caution you against replying, "But, Lord, I do not feel ready." That is most true, but that is not an argument which thou shouldst use to excuse thyself in holding back. It is *his* readiness that is the main thing, not thine, and as all things are ready, do thou come whether thou feelest ready or not. I have heard of some Christians who have said, "I do not feel in a proper frame of mind to pray." My brother, pray till you do. Some have said, "I do not think I shall go up to the house of God to-day, I feel so unhappy, so cast down." When shouldst

thou go so much as then, in order that thou mayest find comfort? "Still," saith one, "you would not have me sing a hymn when of heavy heart?" Ay, would I not, I would indeed, I would have thee sing thyself up from the depths of the sea where all God's billows have gone over thee. David full often did so, when he began a psalm, in the deeps, and then gradually rose, and rose, and rose, till he was in a perfect rapture of delight before the psalm was over. All things are ready with your Lord, therefore do you come whether you happen to be ready or not.

Note the times when this truth ought to have power with you. All things are ready, therefore come to *the storehouse of divine promise*. Are you in spiritual poverty? Come and take what God has provided for you, for all things are yours, and all the blessings of the everlasting hills belong to all the people of God. Are you needing strength? There is a promise, "As thy days so shall thy strength be." It is ready, come and take it. Art thou wanting consolation? Dost thou not know that all things are ready for thy comfort, that two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, are already set before thee? Come thou, and take thy solace. Ay, remember that all that God has promised belongs to all those who believe the promise, and that you may therefore come at all times, however deep your need, and if you have but faith you shall find the special supply for the special want. All things are ready, therefore come with holy confidence, and take what is ripe enough to gather, ripe for you.

Come next to *the mercy seat* in prayer, all things are ready there. The mercy seat is sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ. The veil also is rent in twain, and from between the cherubim Jehovah's glory now shines forth with mildest radiance. Let us therefore come with boldness unto the throne of the heavenly grace, because everything there is ready for the pleading suppliant. Thou hast no need to bring anything with thee there. Thou hast no need of making preparations other than the Holy Spirit waits to give thee in the form of groanings which cannot be uttered. Come, child of God, notwithstanding thy carelessness and indifference, or whatever it may be thou hast to complain of, for though thou be unready, the throne of grace is ready, and therefore do thou draw near to it and find the grace thou needest.

If at this time we feel strong promptings towards *communion* with Christ what a blessing it is that Christ is always ready to commune with his people. "Behold," saith he, "I stand at the door and knock." We think that *we* stand at the door and knock, but it is scarcely so, the greater truth with regard to his people is that Jesus asks for fellowship with us, and tells us that if we open the door, and that is all he bids his people do, he will enter in and sup with them, and they with him. Suppose there is no supper, he will provide it—he hath all things ready. The Master saith, "Where is the guest-chamber?" He doth not say "Where is the feast?" If thy heart will be the guest-chamber, he will provide the supper, and thou shalt sup with him and he with thee. At whose door did Christ knock according to the Scriptures? It was at the door of the Laodicean church, at the door of the very church concerning which he had said, "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Therefore thou poor Laodicean believer that art here this morning, if thou hast

any promptings towards Christ, arise, for all things are ready, and ever thou art aware thy soul shall be as the chariots of Amminadib. He is ready to receive us to his heart of hearts. How sweetly this ought to constrain us to fly into the arms of Jesus.

I think the same thought ought to cross our minds with regard to *every daily duty*. We wake up in the morning, but we do not know exactly what lies before us, for God's providence has constantly new revelations: but I like to think in the morning that all things are ready for my pathway through the day, that if I will go out to serve God in my ministry he has prepared some ear into which I am to drop a gracious word, and some heart in the furrows of which I shall sow some blessed seed effectually. Behold all providence with its mighty wheels is co-working with the servant of the living God: only go forward in zeal and confidence, my brother, and thou shalt find that every step of thy way is ready for thee. Thy Master has trodden the road and marked out for thee the houses of refreshment where thou art to tarry till thou shalt come to the celestial city itself, and the hallowed spots where thou shalt bring glory to his blessed name. For a useful life all things are ready for us.

Yes, and if beyond the daily service of life we should feel a prompting to aspire to a *higher degree of holiness*, if we want to grow in grace and reach the fulness of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus, all things are ready for us. No Christian can have a sacred ambition after holiness which the Lord is not prepared to fulfil. Thou that wiltest to be like thy Master, thou that desirest to make a self-sacrifice that will show the power of his grace in thee, the Holy Spirit waits to help thee, all things shall work for thee, for all things are ready. Come therefore without fear.

One of these days it may be that you and I shall either be grown very old, or else disease will lay hold upon us, and we shall lie upon the sick bed watching and waiting for our Master's coming. Then there shall suddenly appear a messenger from him, who will bring us this word, "All things are ready, come unto the supper," and closing our eyes on earth we shall open them in heaven and see what he has done who so sweetly said, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Oh, it will be a joyous moment when we shall hear the summons, "All things are ready, quit thy house of clay, thy farm, thy merchandise, and even her who lies in thy bosom, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and thou must be there; therefore, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. The winter is over and past, the time of the singing of birds is come for thee, all things are ready, come!" I feel tempted to linger here, but I must tear myself away from that point to pass on to the next.

III. THE PERFECT READINESS OF THE FEAST OF DIVINE MERCY IS EVIDENTLY INTENDED TO BE A STRONG ARGUMENT WITH SINNERS WHY THEY SHOULD COME AT ONCE. To the sinner, then, do I address myself.

Soul, dost thou desire eternal life? Is there within thy spirit a *hungering* and a *thirsting* after such things as may satisfy thy spirit and make thee live for ever? Then hearken while the Master's servant gives

See the invitation. "Come, for *all things* are ready,"—all, not some, but all. There is nothing that thou canst need between here and heaven but what is provided in Jesus Christ, in his person and in his work. All things are ready, life for thy death, forgiveness for thy sin, cleansing for thy filth, clothing for thy nakedness, joy for thy sorrow, strength for thy weakness, yea, more than all that ever thou canst want is stored up in the boundless nature and work of Christ. Thou must not say, "I cannot come because I have not this, or have not that." Art thou to prepare the feast? Art thou to provide anything? Art thou the purveyor of even so much as the salt or the water? Thou knowest not thy true condition, or thou wouldst not dream of such a thing. The great Householder himself has provided the whole of the feast, thou hast nothing to do with the provision but to partake of it. If thou wouldst come and take what thou lackest; the greater thy need the greater reason why thou shouldst come where all things that thy heart possibly want will be at once supplied. If thou be so needy that thou hast nothing good at all about thee, all things are ready. What wouldst thou provide more when God has provided all things? Superfluity of naughtiness would it be if thou wert to think of adding to his 'all things'; it would be but a presumptuous competing with the provisions of the great King, and this he will not endure. All that thou canst do—I can but repeat the words—between the gates of hell, where thou now liest, and the gates of heaven, to which grace will bring thee if thou believest,—all is provided and prepared in Jesus Christ the Saviour.

And all things are *ready*, dwell on that word. The oxen and the fatlings were killed; what is more, they were prepared to be eaten, they were ready to be feasted on, they smoked on the board. It is something when the king gives orders for the slaughter of so many bullocks for the feast, but the feast is not ready then; and when beneath the poleaxe the victims fall, and they are stripped and hung up ready for the fire, here is something done, but they are not ready. It is when the joints are served hot and steaming upon the table, and all that is wanted is brought forth and laid in proper order for the banquet, it is then that all things are ready, and this is the case now; at this very moment thou wilt find the feast to be in the best possible condition; it was never better and never can be better than it is now. All things are ready, just in the exact condition that thou needest them to be, just in such condition as shall be best for thy soul's comfort and enjoyment. All things are ready; nothing needs to be further mellowed or sweetened, everything is at the best that eternal love can make it.

But notice the word, "now," "All things are *now* ready"—just now, at this moment. At feasts, you know, the good housewife is often troubled if the guests come late. She would be sorry if they came half-an-hour too soon, but half-an-hour too late spoils everything, and in that state of fret and worry she is if when all things are *now* ready, her friends still delay. Leave food at the fire awhile, and it does not seem to be "now ready," but something more than ready, and even spoiled. So both the great householder lay stress upon this, all things are *now* ready, therefore come at once. He saith not that if thou wilt tarry for another seven years all things will then be ready: God grant that long before

that space of time thou mayest have got beyond the needs of persuasion by having become a taster of the feast, but he doth say that they are all ready now, just now. Just now that your heart is so heavy and your mind is so careless, that your spirit is so wandering—all things are ready now. Just now, though you have never thought of these things before, but dropped in this morning to see this large assembly with no motive whatever as to your own salvation, yet all things are ready now. Though your sins are as the stars of heaven, and your soul trembles under an awful foreboding of coming judgment, yet "all things are now ready." After all your rejections of Christ, after the many invitations that have been thrown away upon you, come ye to the supper.

And if they are ready *now*, the argument is come *now*, while still all things are ready. While the Spirit lingers and still doth strive with men, while mercy's gates still stand wide open, that "whosoever will may come," while life and health and reason still are spared to you and the ministering voice that bids thee come can still be heard, come now, come at once—all things are ready—come! Delay is as unreasonable as it is wicked now that all things are ready.

Notice that all things were ready for those who were bidden. They did not come, but they were not mocked when they were bidden to come. The fact of all things being ready proved that the invitation was a sincere one, although it was a rejected one. There are some who will not have us give an invitation to any but to those whom we believe are sure to come, nay, in a measure have come; that is to say, they make a minister to be a mere superfluity. Why need he come and invite those who have already begun to come? But we believe it to be our duty and our privilege to invite the whole mass of mankind; and even those who will not come: if we knew they would not come we should not therefore exempt them from the bidding, for the servant was sent to bid them to the wedding who nevertheless all with one consent began to make excuse. They were invited, and earnestly invited, and all things were ready, though they came not. O my dear hearers, if you do not come to Christ you will perish, but you will never be able to say you were not bidden, and that there was nothing ready for you. No, there stands the feast all spread, and you are sincerely and honestly bidden to come. God grant that you may come, and come at once.

IV. Now I am going to pass on to my fourth and last point, which may God bless to the comfort of some seeking soul. THIS TEXT DISPOSES OF A GREAT DEAL OF TALK ABOUT THE SINNER'S READINESS OR UNREADINESS: because, if the reason why a sinner is to come is because all things are ready, then it is idle for him to say "But I am not ready." It is clear that all the readiness required on man's part is a willingness to come and receive the blessing which God had provided. There is nothing else necessary; if men are willing to come, they may come, they will come. Where the Lord has been pleased to touch the will so that man has a desire towards Christ, where the heart really hungers and thirsts after righteousness, that is all the readiness which is wanted. All the fitness he requireth is that first you feel your need of him (and that he gives you), and that secondly in feeling

your need of him you are willing to come to him. Willingness to come is everything. A readiness to believe in Jesus, a willingness to cast the soul on him, a preparedness to accept him just as he is, because you feel that he is just the Saviour that you need—that is all: there was no other readiness, there could have been none, in the case of those who were poor and blind, and halt, and maimed, yet came to the feast. The text does not say, "You are ready, therefore come," that is a legal way of putting the gospel; but it says, "All things are ready, the gospel is ready, therefore you are to come." As for *your* readiness, all the readiness that is possibly wanted is a readiness which the Spirit gives us, namely, willingness to come to Jesus.

Now notice that the unreadiness of those who were bidden arose out of their possessions and out of their abilities. One would not come because he had bought a piece of land. What a great heap Satan casts up between the soul and the Saviour! What with worldly possessions and good deeds he builds an earthwork of huge dimensions between the sinner and his Lord. Some gentlemen have too many acres ever to come to Christ: they think too much of the world to think much of him. Many have too many fields of good works in which there are growing crops in which they pride themselves, and these cause them to feel that they are persons of great importance. Many a man cannot come to Christ for all things because he has so much already. Others of them could not come because they had so much to do, and could do it well—one had bought five yoke of oxen, he was going to prove them; a strong man quite able for ploughing; the reason why he did not come was because he had so much ability. Thousands are kept away from grace by what they have and by what they can do. Emptiness is more preparatory to a feast than fulness. How often does it happen that poverty and inability even help to lead the soul to Christ. When a man thinketh himself to be rich he will not come to the Saviour. When a man dreameth that he is able at any time to repent and believe, and to do everything for himself that is wanted, he is not likely to come and by a simple faith repose in Christ. It is not what you have not but what you have that keeps many of you from Christ. Sinful self is a devil, but righteous self is seven devils. The man who feels himself guilty may for awhile be kept away by his guilt, but the man who is self-righteous will never come: until the Lord has taken his pride away from him he will still refuse the feast of free grace. The possession of abilities and honours and riches keep men from coming to the Redeemer.

But on the other hand personal condition does not constitute an unfitness for coming to Christ, for the sad condition of those who became guests did not debar them from the supper. Some were *poor*, and doubtless wretched and ragged; they had not a penny to bless themselves with, as we say; their garments were tattered, perhaps worse, they were filthy, they were not fit to be near respectable people, they would certainly be no credit to my lord's table; but those who went to bring them in did not search their pockets, nor look at their coats, but they fetched them in. They were poor, but the messengers were told to bring in the poor, and therefore brought them. Their poverty did not prevent their being ready; and oh, poor soul, if thou be poor literally, or

poor spiritually, neither sort of poverty can constitute an unfitness for divine mercy.

"The poorer the wretch the welcomer here."

If thou art brought to thy last penny, yea, if that is spent, and if thou hast pawned all, and thou art left in debt over head and ears, and thinkest that there is nothing for thee but to be laid by the heels in prison for ever, nevertheless thou mayest come, poverty and all.

Another class of them were *maimed*, and so were not very comely in appearance: an arm had been lopped off, or an eye had been gouged out. One had lost a nose, and another a leg. They were in all stages and shapes of dismemberment. Sometimes we turn our heads away, and feel that we would rather give anything than look upon beggars who show their wounds, and describe how they were maimed. But it did not matter how badly they were disfigured; they were brought in, and not one of them was repulsed because of the ugly cuts he had received. So, poor soul, however Satan may have torn and lopped thee, and into whatsoever condition he may have brought thee, so that thou feelest ashamed to live, nevertheless this is no unfitness for coming; just as thou art thou mayest come to his table of grace. Moral disfigurements are soon rectified when Jesus takes the character in hand. Come thou to him, however sadly thou art injured by sin.

There were others who were *halt*, that is to say, they had lost a leg, or it was of no use to them, and they could not come except they had a crutch and crawled or hopped upon it; but nevertheless that was no reason why they were not welcome. Ah, if you find it difficult to believe, it is no reason why you should not come and receive the grand absolution which Jesus Christ is ready to bestow upon you. Lame with doubting and distrusting, nevertheless come to the supper and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Others were *blind* people, and when they were told to come they could not see the way, but in that case the messenger was not told to tell them to come, he was commanded to bring them, and a blind man can come if he is brought. All that was wanted was willingness to be led by the hand in the right direction. Now you that cannot fully understand the gospel as you desire to do, that are puzzled and muddled, give your hand into the hand of Jesus, and be willing to be led, be willing to believe what you cannot comprehend, and to grasp in confidence that which you are not able yet to measure with your understanding. The blind, however ignorant or uninstructed they are, shall not be kept away because of that.

Then there were the men in the *highways*, I suppose they were beggars; and the men in the *hedges*, I suppose they were hiding, and were probably thieves; but nevertheless they were told to come, and though

they were highwaymen and hedge-birds even that did not prevent their coming and finding welcome. Though outcasts, offcasts, spiritual ipsisies, people that nobody cared for, yet, whatever they might be, that was not the question, they were to come because all things were ready: come in rags, come in filth, come maimed, come covered with sores, come in all sorts of filthiness and abomination, yet because all things were ready they were to be brought or to be compelled to come in.

Now, lastly, I think it was the very thing, which in any one of these people looked like unfitness, which was a help to them. It is a great truth that what we regard as unfitness is often our truest fitness. I want you to notice these poor, blind, and halt people. Some of those who were invited would not come because they had bought some land, or five yoke of oxen, but when the messenger went up to the poor man in rags and said, "Come to the supper," it is quite clear he would not say he had bought a field, or oxen, for he could not do it, he had not a penny to do the thing with, so that he was clean delivered from that temptation. And when a man is invited to come to Christ and he says, "I do not want him, I have a righteousness of my own," he will stay away; but when the Lord Jesus came along to me I never was tempted in that way, because I had no righteousness of my own, and could not have made one if I had tried. I know some here who could not patch up a garment of righteousness if they were to put all their rags together, and this is a great help to their receiving the Lord Jesus. What a blessedness it is to have such a sense of soul poverty that you will never stay away from Christ because of what you possess.

Then, next, some could not come because they had married a wife. Now, I think it is very likely that these people who were maimed and cut about were so injured that they had no wife, and perhaps could not get anybody to have them. Well then, they had not that temptation, to stay away. They were too maimed to attract the eye of anybody who was looking for beauty, and therefore they were not tempted that way. But they found at the ever-blessed supper of the Lamb an everlasting wedlock, which was infinitely better. Thus do souls lose earthly joys and comforts, and by the loss they gain supremely: they are thus made willing to close in with Christ and find a higher comfort and a higher joy. That maiming which looked like unfitness turned out to be fitness.

One excuse made was, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." The halt could not do that. When the messenger touched the lame man on the shoulder and said "Come," he could not say, "I am going out to-night to plough with my new teams." He had never been over the clods ever since he had lost his leg, poor soul, so that he could not make such an excuse. The blind man could not say, "I have bought a piece of land and I must go to see it;" he was free

from all the lusts of the eye, and so far was all the more ready to be led to the supper. When a soul feels its own sinfulness, and wretchedness, and lost estate, it thinks itself unfit to come to Christ, but this is an assistance to it, since it prevents its looking to anything else but Christ, kills its excuses, and makes it free to accept salvation by grace.

But how about the men that were in the highway? Well, it seems to me that they were already on the road, and at least out of their houses, if they had any. If they were out there begging, they were the more ready to accept an invitation to a meal of victuals, for it was that they were singing for. A man who is out of the house of his own self-righteousness, though he be a great sinner, is in a more favourable position and more likely to come to Christ than he who prides himself in his supposed self-righteousness.

As for those who were under the hedges, well, they had no house of their own, and so they were all the more likely to come and fill God's house. Men do not take to hedges to sleep under them as long as they have even a hovel where they may rest their head, but oh, poor soul, when thou art driven to such distress that thou wouldst fain hide under any hedge, when thou hast nothing left thee but a fearful looking for of judgment, when thou thinkest thyself to be an outlaw and an outcast before God, left to wander like Cain, a wail and stray, lost to all good, thou art the very man to come to Christ. Come out of your hedges, then. I am looking for you. Though you hide yourselves away yet God's own Spirit will discover you, and bring you, I trust this very morning, to feed on love divine. Trust Jesus Christ, that is all, just as you are, with all your unfitness and unreadiness. Take what God has made ready for you, the precious blood to cleanse you, a robe of righteousness to cover you, eternal joy to be your portion. Receive the grace of God in Christ Jesus, oh receive it now. God grant you may for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xiv. 12—35.

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OUR LORD'S QUESTION TO THE BLIND MEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MAY 13TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

On this occasion the Members of the regular Congregation left their seats to strangers.

"And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened."—Matthew ix. 27—30.

IN OUR OWN streets we meet here and there with a blind beggar, but they swarm in Eastern cities. Ophthalmia is the scourge of Egypt and Syria, and Volney declares that in Cairo, out of a hundred persons whom he met, twenty were quite blind, ten wanted one eye, and twenty others were more or less afflicted in that organ. At the present day every one is struck with the immense number of the blind in oriental lands, and things were probably worse in our Saviour's times. We ought to be very grateful that leprosy, ophthalmia, and certain other forms of disease have been wonderfully held in check among us in modern times, so that the plague which devastated our city two hundred years ago is now unknown, and our Lock hospitals are no longer crowded with lepers. Blindness is now often prevented, and frequently cured; and it is not by any means an evil of such frequent occurrence as to constitute a leading source of the poverty of the country. Because there were so many blind folk in our Saviour's day, and so many gathered around him, we very commonly read of his healing the blind. Mercy met misery on its own ground. Where human sorrow was most conspicuous divine power was most compassionate. Now, in these days it is a very usual thing for men to be blind spiritually, and therefore I have great hope that our Lord Jesus will act after his former manner, and display his power amid the abounding evil. I trust there are some here at this hour who are longing to obtain spiritual sight, longing especially, like the two blind men in our text, to see Jesus, whom to see is everlasting life. We have come to-night to speak to those who feel their spiritual blindness and are pining for the light of God—the light of pardon, the light of love and peace, the

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light of holiness and purity. Our eager desire is that the pall of darkness may be lifted, that the divine ray may find a passage into the soul's inner gloom, and cause the night of nature to pass away for ever. O that the moment of day-dawn may be just at hand to many of you who are "inly blind." Immediate illumination is the blessing I implore upon you. I know that truth may abide in the memory for years, and at last produce fruit; but at this time our prayer is for immediate results, for such only will be in accordance with the nature of the light whereof we speak. At the first, Jehovah did but say, "Let there be light," and there was light; and when Jehovah Jesus sojourned here below he did but touch the eyes of the blind and straightway they received sight. O for the like speedy work at this hour! Men who were led by the hand to Jesus, or groped their way along the wall to the place where his voice proclaimed his presence, were touched by his finger and went home without a guide, rejoicing that Jesus Christ had opened their eyes. Such marvels Jesus is still able to perform; and, depending upon the Holy Spirit, we will preach his word and watch for the signs following, expecting to see them at once. Why should not hundreds of you who came into this Tabernacle in nature's blackness go forth from it blessed with the light of heaven? This, at any rate, is our heart's inmost and uppermost desire, and at this we aim with concentrated faculties. Come with us, then, to the text, and be at once friendly enough to yourselves to be willing to be affected by the truths which it will bring before you.

I. First, in explaining the passage before us, we must call your attention to **THE SEEKERS** themselves—the two blind men. There is something about them worthy of imitation by all who would be saved.

We notice at once that the two blind men were *in downright earnest*. The word which describes their appeal to Christ is, "crying," and by this is not meant mere speaking, for they are represented as "crying and saying." Now, crying implies earnest, energetic, pathetic imploring, pleading, and beseeching. Their tones and gestures indicated that theirs was no holiday fancy, but a deep, passionate craving. Imagine yourselves in such a case. How eager you would be for the blessed light if for years you had been compelled to abide in what Milton called "the ever-during dark." They were hungering and thirsting after sight. Now, we cannot hope for salvation till we seek it with equal vigour, and yet how few are in earnest about being saved. How earnest some men are about their money, their health, or their children! How warm they are upon politics and parish business; but the moment you touch them upon matters of true godliness they are as cool as the Arctic snows. O sirs, how is this? Do you expect to be saved while you are half asleep? Do you expect to find pardon and grace while you continue in listless indifference? If so, you are woefully mistaken, for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Death and eternity, judgment and hell are not things to play with; the soul's eternal destiny is no small matter, and salvation by the precious blood of Christ is no trifle. Men are not saved from going down into the pit by a careless nod or a wink. A mumbled "Our Father," or a hasty "Lord, have mercy upon me," will not suffice. These blind men would have remained blind had they not been in earnest to have their

eyes opened; and so, many continue in their sins because they are not earnest to escape from them. These men were fully awake. Dear hearer, are you? Can you join with me in these two verses?

"Jesus, who now art passing by,
Our Prophet, Priest, and King thou art :
Hear a poor unbeliever's cry,
And heal the blindness of my heart :

"Urging my passionate request,
Thy pardoning mercy I implore,
Whoe'er rebuke I will not rest,
Till thou my spirit's sight restore."

The blind men were *thoroughly persevering* in consequence of being earnest, for they "followed" Christ, and so continued to urge their suit. How did they manage to follow the movements of the Lord? We do not know: it must have been very difficult, for they were blind, but they doubt asked others the way which the Master had taken, and they kept their ears open to every sound. Doubtless they said, "Where is he? Where is Jesus? Lead us, guide us. We must find him." We do not know how far our Lord had gone, but we know this, that as far as he had gone they followed. They were so bravely persevering that having reached the house where he was, they did not stay outside waiting till he came out again, but they pressed into the room where he sat. They were insatiable for sight. Their earnest cries took him off from his reaching, he paused and listened while they said, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Thus does perseverance prevail: no man shall be lost who knows the art of importunate prayer. If thou wilt resolve never to leave the gate of mercy till the porter opens to thee, he will assuredly nbar the door. If thou dost grasp the covenant angel with this resolve, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," thou shalt come forth from the place of wrestling more than a conqueror. A mouth open in never-ceasing prayer shall bring about eyes open in full vision of faith. Pray, therefore, in the darkness, even if there be no hope of light; for when God, who is light itself, moves a poor sinner to plead and cry out before him with the solemn intent to continue so to do till the blessing comes, he has no thought of mocking that poor crying heart. Perseverance in prayer is a sure sign that the day of the opening of the eyes is near.

The blind men *had a definite object* in their prayers. They knew what they wanted, they were not like children crying for nothing, or reedy misers crying for everything; they wanted their sight and they knew it. Too many blind souls are unaware of their blindness, and therefore when they pray they ask for anything except the one thing needful. Many so-called prayers consist in saying very nice words, very pretty, pious sentences, but they are not prayer. Prayer "to loved ones" is communion with God, and to persons seeking salvation is asking for what you want and expecting to receive it through the name of Jesus, whose name you plead with God. But what sort of prayer is that in which there is no sense of need, no direct asking, no intelligent pleading? Dear hearer, have you in distinct terms asked the Lord to save you? Have you expressed your need of a new heart, your need of being washed in the blood of Christ, your need of

being made God's child, and adopted into his family? There is no praying till a man knows what he is praying for, and sets himself to pray for *it*, as if he cared for nothing else. If being already earnest and importunate, he is also instructed and full of definite desires, he is sure to succeed in his pleading. With a strong arm he draws the bow of desire, and fits upon the string the sharp arrow of passionate longing, and then with the instructed eye of perception he takes deliberate aim, and therefore we may expect that he will hit the very centre of the target. Pray for light, life, forgiveness, salvation, and pray for these with all your soul, and as surely as Christ is in heaven he will give these good gifts to you. Whom did he ever refuse?

These blind men in their prayers *honoured Christ*, for they said, "Thou Son of David have mercy on us." The great ones of the land were loath to recognize our Lord as being of the seed royal, but these blind men proclaimed the Son of David right lustily. They were blind, but they could see a great deal more than some with sharp eyes; for they could see that the Nazarene was the Messiah, sent of God to restore the kingdom unto Israel. They gathered from this belief that, as the Messiah was to open blind eyes, Jesus, being the Messiah, could open *their* blind eyes; and so they appealed to him to perform the tokens of his office, thus honouring him by a real, practical faith. This is the manner of prayer which will always speed with heaven, the prayer which crowns the Son of David. Pray, glorifying Christ Jesus in your prayers, making much of him, pleading much the merit of his life and death, giving him glorious titles because your soul has a high reverence and a vast esteem of him. Jesus-adoring prayers have in them the force and swiftness of eagles' wings, they must ascend to God, for the elements of heavenly power are abundant in them. Prayer which makes little of Christ is prayer which God will make little of; but the prayer in which the soul glorifies the Redeemer rises like a perfumed pillar of incense from the Most Holy place, and the Lord himself smells a sweet savour.

Observe, also, that these two blind men in their prayer *confessed their unworthiness*. "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Their sole appeal was to mercy. There was no talk about merit, no pleading of their past sufferings, or their persevering endeavours, or their resolves for the future; but, "Have mercy on us." He will never win a blessing from God who demands it as if he had a right to it. We must plead with God as a condemned criminal appeals to his sovereign, asking for the exercise of the royal prerogative of free pardon. As a beggar asks for alms in the street, by pleading his need of it and requesting a gift for charity's sake, so must we apply to the Most High, appealing *ad misericordiam*, and directing our supplication to the lovingkindness and tender mercy of the Lord. We must plead after this fashion—"O God, if thou destroy me I deserve it. If never a comfortable look should come from thy face to me I cannot complain. But save a sinner, Lord, for mercy's sake. I have no claim upon thee whatsoever, but oh, because thou art full of grace, look on a poor blind soul that *faid* would look on thee."

My brethren, I cannot put fine words together. I have never occupied myself in the school of oratory. In fact, my heart abhors the very idea of seeking to speak finely when souls are in peril. No, I labour to

peak straight home to your hearts and consciences, and if there be in his listening throng any who are listening in the right manner, God will bless the word to them. "And what kind of listening is that?" say you. Why, that in which the man says, "As far as I perceive that the preacher delivers God's word I will follow him, and I will do what he describes the seeking sinner as doing. I will pray and plead to-night and I will persevere in my entreaties, labouring to glorify the name of Jesus, and at the same time confessing my own unworthiness. Thus, even thus, will I crave mercy at the hands of the Son of David." Happy is the preacher if he knows that such will be the case.

II. Now, we will pause a minute and note, secondly, THE QUESTION WHICH WAS PUT TO THEM. They sought to have their eyes opened. They both stood before the Lord whom they could not see, but who could see *them* and could reveal himself to them by their hearing. He began to question them, not that *he* might know them, but that they might know themselves. He asked only one question: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" That question touched the only thing which stood between them and sight. On their answer depended whether they should go out of that room seeing men or blind. "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" Now, I believe that between every seeking sinner and Christ there is only this one question—"Believest thou that I am able to do this?" and if any man can truly answer as the men in the narrative did, "Yea Lord," he will assuredly receive the reply, "According to your faith be it unto you."

Let us look, then, at this very weighty question with very serious attention. It concerned *their faith*. "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" He did not ask them what kind of characters they had been in the past, because when men come to Christ the past is forgiven them. He did not ask them whether they had tried various means of getting their eyes opened, because whether they had or had not they were still blind. He did not ask them even whether they thought there might be a mysterious physician who would effect a cure in a future state. No. Curious questions and idle speculations are never suggested by the Lord Jesus. His enquiries were all resolved into a trial upon one point, and that one point, faith. Did they believe that he, the Son of David, could heal them? Why does our Lord everywhere, not only in his ministry but in the teaching of the apostles, always lay such stress upon faith? Why is faith so essential? It is because of its receptive power. A purse will not make a man rich, and yet without some place for his money how could a man acquire wealth? Faith of itself could not contribute a penny to salvation, but it is the purse which holds a precious Christ within itself, yea, it holds all the treasures of divine love. If a man is thirsty a rope and a bucket are not in themselves of much use to him, but yet, sirs, if there is a well near at hand the very thing that is wanted is a bucket and a rope, by means of which the water can be lifted. Faith is the bucket by means of which a man may draw water out of the wells of salvation, and drink to his heart's content. You may sometimes have stopped a moment at a street fountain, and have desired to drink, but you found you could not, for the drinking-cup was gone. The water flowed, but you could not get at it. It was tantalizing to be at the fountain-head and yet to be thirsty still for want of a little

cup. Now faith is that little cup, which we hold up to the flowing stream of Christ's grace: we fill it, and then we drink and are refreshed. Hence the importance of faith. It would have seemed to our forefathers an idle thing to lay down a cable under the sea from England to America, and it would be idle now if it were not that science has taught us how to speak by lightning: yet the cable itself is now of the utmost importance, for the best inventions of telegraphy would be of no use for purposes of transatlantic communication if there were not the connecting wire between the two continents. Faith is just that; it is the connecting link between our souls and God, and the living message flashes along it to our souls. Faith is sometimes weak and comparable only to a very slender thread; but it is a very precious thing for all that, for it is the beginning of great things. Years ago they were wanting to throw a suspension bridge across a mighty chasm, through which flowed, far down, a navigable river. From crag to crag it was proposed to hang an iron bridge aloft in the air, but how was it to be commenced? They shot an arrow from one side to the other, and it carried across the gulf a tiny thread. That invisible thread was enough to begin with. The connection was established; by-and-by the thread drew a piece of twine, the twine carried after it a small rope, the rope soon carried a cable across, and all in good time came the iron chains and all else that was needed for the permanent way. Now, faith is often very weak, but even in that case it is still of the utmost value, for it forms a communication between the soul and the Lord Jesus Christ. If thou believest in him there is a link between him and thee; thy sinfulness rests on his grace, thy weakness hangs on his strength, thy nothingness hides itself in his all-sufficiency; but if thou believest not, thou art apart from Jesus, and no blessing can flow to thee. So the question that I have to address in my Master's name to-night to every seeking sinner has to do with his faith and nothing else. It does not matter to me whether you are a hundred thousand pounds man or whether you earn a few shillings a week, whether you are a peer or a pauper, whether you are royal or rustic, learned or ignorant. We have the same gospel to deliver to every man, woman, and child, and we have to lay the stress upon the same point—"Believest thou?" If thou believest thou shalt be saved, but if thou believest not thou canst not partake of the blessings of grace.

Notice, next, that the question concerned *their faith in Jesus*. "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" If we were to ask the awakened sinner, "Dost thou believe that thou canst save thyself?" his answer would be, "No, that I do not: I know better. My self-sufficiency is dead." If we were then to put the question to him, "Believest thou that ordinances and means of grace and sacraments can save thee?" if he is an intelligent, awakened penitent, he will reply, "I know better. I have tried them, but in and of themselves they are utter vanity." Truly it is so, there remains in us and around us nothing upon which hope can build, even for an hour. But the enquiry passes beyond self and casts us upon Jesus only, by bidding us hear the Lord himself say, "Believe that I am able to do this?" Now, beloved, we are not talking concerning a merely historical person when we speak about the Lord Jesus. We speak of one who is above all others. He is the Son of the

ighest, and yet he came to this earth and was born a babe at Bethlehem. He slept upon a woman's bosom, and grew up as other children. He became a man in fulness of stature and wisdom, living here for thirty years or more, doing good. At the last this glorious God in human flesh "died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," standing in the room and place and stead of guilty man, that he might bear man's punishment—that God might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth. He died and was buried, but only for a short time could the grave contain him; early in the morning of the third day he rose and left the dead, no more to die. He tarried here sufficiently long for many to see him alive and really in the body. An event in history is so well authenticated as the resurrection of Christ, he was seen by individuals alone, and by twos and twenties, and above five hundred brethren at once. After having lived here a little while he ascended up into heaven in the presence of his disciples, a cloud receiving him out of their sight. At this moment he is sitting at the right hand of God in human flesh: that selfsame man who died upon the tree is now enthroned in the highest heavens Lord of all, and every angel delights to do him homage. The one question which he asks of you to-night, through these poor lips is this, "Believest thou that I am able to save thee—that I, the Christ of God now dwelling in heaven, am able to save thee?" Everything depends upon your answer to that question. I know what your answer ought to be. Surely, if he be God, nothing is impossible or even difficult to him. If he has laid down his life to make atonement, and God has accepted that atonement, by permitting him to rise from the dead, then there must be efficacy in his blood to cleanse me, even me. The answer ought to be, **Yea, Lord Jesus, I believe that thou art able to do this.**"

But now I want to lay stress on another word of my text, and I want us to lay stress on it too. "Believe ye that I am able to do *this*?" Now, it would have been of no use for these blind men to say, "We believe that thou canst raise the dead." "No," says Christ, "the matter in hand is the opening of your eyes. Believe ye that I am able to do *this*?" They might have replied, "Good Master, we believe that thou didst staunch the woman's issue when she touched thy garment." "No," says he, "that is not the question. Your eyes have now to be attended to. You want sight, and the question about your faith is, believe ye that I am able to do *this*?" Ah, some of you can believe for other people, but we must bring the question more fully home to you and say, "Believest thou that Christ is able to save *thee*—even *thee*? Is he able to do *this*?" Possibly I address some one who has gone very far in sin. It may be, my friend, you have crowded a great deal of iniquity into a short space. You went in for a short life and a merry one, and according to your present prospects you are likely enough to live a short life, but the merriment is pretty nearly over with you already, and as you look back upon your life, you reflect that never did a young man or a young woman throw life away more foolishly than you have done. Now then, do you desire to be saved? Can you say from your heart that you do? Answer me, then, this further question, do you believe that Jesus Christ is able to do *this*, namely, to blot out *l your sins*, to renew *your heart*, and to save *you to-night*? "Oh,

sir, I do believe he is able to forgive sin." But believest thou that he is able to forgive *your* sin? You yourself are the case in hand; how holds your faith on that point? Let the cases of others alone just now, and consider yourself. Believest thou that he is able to do *this*? *This*—this sin of thine, this misspent life, is Jesus able to cope with *this*? On your answer to that question everything depends. It is an idle faith which dreams of believing in the Lord's power over others, but then declares that it has no confidence in him for itself. You must believe that he is able to do *this*—this which concerns you, or you are for all practical purposes an unbeliever.

I know I am speaking to a great many persons who never did go into the vices of the world. I thank God on your behalf that you have been kept in the ways of morality and sobriety and honesty; yet I have known some of you almost wish, or at least it has occurred to you that you might almost wish—that you had been great, open sinners, that you might be preached to as open sinners are, and that you might see a change in yourself equal to what you have seen in some of them, about whose conversion you can never doubt. Do not indulge so unwise a wish, but listen while I put this question to you also. Your case is that of a moralist who has obeyed every outward duty, but has neglected his God—the case of a moralist who feels as if repentance were to him impossible, because he has been so long eaten up with self-righteousness that he knows not how to cut out the gangrene. The Lord Jesus Christ can as easily save you from your self-righteousness as he can save another from his guilty habits. Do you believe that he is able to do *this*? Come now, do you believe that he is able to meet *this*, your own peculiar case? Give me "yes" or "no" to this question.

"Alas," cries one of you, "my heart is so hard." Dost thou believe that he can soften it? Suppose it to be as hard as granite: dost thou now believe that the Christ of God can turn it into wax in a moment? Suppose thy heart to be as fickle as the wind and waves of the sea: canst thou believe that he can make thee stable-minded and settle thee upon the Rock of Ages for ever? If thou believest in him he will do this for thee, for according to thy faith shall it be unto thee. But I know the pinch lies here. Everybody tries to run away to the thought that he does believe in Christ's power for others, but he trembles for himself; but I must hold each man to the point which concerns himself, I must buttonhole you and bring you to the real test. Jesus asks each one of you—"Dost thou believe that I am able to do *this*?"

"Why," says one, "it would be the most surprising thing that even the Lord Jesus ever did if he were to save me to-night." Dost thou believe that he can do it? Wilt thou trust him to do it now? "But it will be such a strange thing, such a miracle!" The Lord Jesus works strange things: it is the way of him. He was ever a miracle-worker. Canst thou believe him able to do this for thee, even *this*, which is now needed to save thee?

It is wonderful the power which faith has—power over the Lord Jesus himself. I have often experienced in my little way how confidence will master you. Have you not frequently been conquered by the trustfulness of a tiny child? The simple request was too full of trust to be refused. Have you ever been grasped by a blind man at a street crossing, who has

did to you, "Sir, would you take me across the road?" And then, perhaps, he has said somewhat cunningly, "I know by the tone of your voice that you are kind. I feel I could trust myself with you." At such a time you have felt that you were in for it; you could not let him go. And when a soul says to Jesus, "I know thou canst save me, my Lord: I know thou canst, therefore in thee do I trust," why he cannot shake you off, he cannot wish to do so, for he has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." I sometimes tell a story to illustrate this; it is a simple tale enough, but it shows how faith wins everywhere. Many years ago my garden happened to be surrounded by a hedge, which looked green, but was a poor protection. A neighbour's dog was very fond of visiting my garden, and as he never improved my flowers I never gave him a cordial welcome. Walking along quietly one evening I saw him doing mischief. I threw a stick at him and advised him to go home; but how did the good creature reply to me? He turned round and wagged his tail, and in the merriest manner picked up my stick, and brought it to me, and laid it at my feet. Did he strike him? No, I am not a monster. I should have been ashamed of myself if I had not patted him on the back and told him to come there whenever he liked. He and I were friends directly, because you see he trusted me and conquered me. Now, simple as the story is, that is just the philosophy of a sinner's faith in Christ. As the dog mastered the man by confiding in him, so a poor guilty sinner does, in effect, master the Lord himself by trusting him, when he says, "Lord, I am a poor dog of a sinner, and thou mightest drive me away, but I believe thee to be too good for that. I believe thou canst save me, and lo! I trust myself with thee. Whether I am lost or saved, I trust myself with thee." Ah, dear heart, you will never be lost if you thus trust. He who trusts himself with Jesus has given the answer to the question, 'Dost thou believe that I am able to do this?' and there is nothing now left but for him to go his way and rejoice, for the Lord has opened his eyes and saved him.

III. Now, thirdly, THAT QUESTION WAS A VERY REASONABLE ONE. 'Believe ye that I am able to do this?' Just a minute, let me show that it was a very reasonable question for Christ to put, and equally reasonable for me to urge home upon many here present. Our Lord Jesus might have said, "If you do not believe that I am able to do this, why did you follow me? Why did you follow me more than anybody else? You have been after me down the streets, and you have come into this house after me. Why have you done this if you do not believe that I am able to open your eyes?" So a large proportion of you who are here to-night attend a place of worship: you like to be there; but why, if you do not believe Jesus? What do you go there for? Do you go to seek a Saviour who cannot save you? Do you foolishly seek after one in whom you cannot trust? I have never heard of such madness as for a sick man to run after a doctor in whom he has no confidence. And do you come here to-night and attend your places of worship at other times without having any faith in Jesus? Then why do you come? What inconsistent people you must be?

Again: these blind men had been praying to Jesus to open their eyes, but *why did they pray?* If they did not believe that Jesus

could heal them their prayers were a mockery. Would you ask a man to do a thing which you knew he could not do? Must not prayer always be measured by the quantity of faith that we put into it? Now, I know that some of you have been in the habit of prayer ever since you were little children; you scarcely ever go to bed at nights without repeating the form of prayer your mother taught you. What do you do that for if you do not believe that Jesus Christ can save you? Why ask him to do what you do not believe he can do? What strange inconsistency—to pray without faith!

Moreover, these two blind men had called Jesus Christ the “Son of David.” Why had they thus *confessed his Messiahship*? The most of you do the same. I suppose that out of this congregation there are very few who doubt the deity of Christ. You believe in the Word of God: you do not doubt that it is inspired; you believe that Jesus Christ has lived and died and gone into his glory. Well, then, if you do not believe that he is able to save you, what do you mean by saying that he is God? God, and yet not able? A dying, bleeding, atoning, sacrifice, and yet not able to save? Oh, man, your nominal creed is not your true one. If you were to write your true creed out it would run something like this—“I do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, or that he has made a full atonement for sin, for I do not believe that he is able to save me.” Would not that be correct and all of a piece?

Well, then, I charge you by your frequent hearings of the Word, by your habitual prayers, and by your profession of being believers in that grand old Bible, answer me:—How is it that you do not believe in Jesus? Sirs, he must be able to save you. Do you know it is some seven-and-twenty years or more since I put my trust in him, and I must speak of him as I find. In every hour of darkness, in every season of despondency, in every time of trial I have found him faithful and true; and, as to trusting him with my soul, if I had a thousand souls I would trust them with him; and if I had as many souls as there are sands upon the sea-shore I would not ask for a second Saviour, but would just put them all into that dear hand which was pierced with the nail, that he might grasp us and hold us fast for ever. He is worthy of your trust, and your trust is all he asks of you: knowing that he is able—and you cannot doubt that he is willing, seeing that he has died—he asks you to act upon your belief that he is able to save you, and trust yourself to him.

IV. Now, I must not detain you much longer, and therefore I want to notice THE ANSWER which these blind men gave to his question. They said to him, “Yea, Lord.” Well, now, I have been pressing that question upon you, and I again repeat it. Do you believe that Christ is able to save *you*, that he is able to do this, to touch your case in all its speciality? Now for your answer. How many will say “Yea, Lord.” I am half inclined to ask you to say it aloud; but I will rather beg you to say it in your secret souls—“Yea, Lord.” And now may God the Holy Spirit help you to say it very *distinctly*, without any holding back and mental reservation, “Yea, Lord. Blind eye, dumb tongue, cold heart—I believe that thou art able to change them all, and I rest myself on thee, to be renewed by thy divine grace.” Say it

and mean it. Say it decidedly and distinctly, with your whole heart, "Yea, Lord."

Notice that the two men replied *immediately*. The question was no sooner out of Christ's mouth than they gave the answer, "Yea, Lord." There is nothing like being prompt in your answers; for, when you ask a man a question and you say, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" and he stops, rubs his forehead, strokes his head, and at last says,—*"Y—yes,"* does not such a "yes" sound uncommonly like "no"? The best "yes" in the world is the "yes" which leaps forth directly. "Yea, Lord; bad as I am, I believe thou canst save me, for I know thy precious blood can take away every stain. Though I am an old sinner, though I am an aggravated sinner, though I am one who has gone back from a profession of religion, and have played the backslider's part, though I seem to be an outcast from society, though I do not at this time feel as I could wish to feel, and am the very reverse of what I ought to be, yet I do believe that if Christ has died for sinners, that if the eternal Son of God has gone into heaven to plead for sinners, then he must be 'able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him,' and I come to God to-night by him, and I do believe that he is able to save even me." That is the kind of answer which I long to get from you all. May the Spirit of God produce it!

V. Then see OUR LORD'S RESPONSE to their answer. He said, "According to your faith be it unto you." As much as if he had said,—*"If you believe in me there is light for your blind eyes. So true the faith, so true the sight. If you believe decidedly and fully you shall not have one eye opened, or both eyes half opened, but all your sight shall be given to you. Decided faith shall clear away every speck, and make your vision strong and clear. If your answer is quick, so shall my answer be. You shall see in a moment, for you at once believed. The Lord's power just kept touch with their faith. If their faith was true his cure was true. If their faith was complete his cure was complete; and if their faith said "yes" directly, he gave them sight directly. If you are a long while in saying "yes" you will be a long while in getting peace; but if you say to-night, "I will venture it, for I see it is so; Jesus must be able to save me; I will give myself up to him;" if you do that at once you shall have instantaneous peace—yes, in that very seat, young man, you who are burdened to-night shall find rest. You shall wonder where the burden has gone, and look round and find that it has vanished, because you have looked to the Crucified One, and trusted all your sins with him. Your bad habits, which you have been trying in vain to conquer, which have forged fresh chains to hold you fast, you shall find them fall from off you, like spiders' webs. If you can but trust Jesus to break them, and give yourself up to him to be renewed by him, it shall be done and done to-night; and heaven's eternal arches shall ring with shouts of sovereign grace.*

Thus I have put the whole matter before you. My only hope is that God the blessed Spirit will lead you to seek as the blind men sought, and especially to trust as they trusted.

This last word. There are some persons who are specially diligent in finding out reasons why they should not be saved. I have battled with

some such by the half-hour together, and they always finish up with, "Yes, that is true, sir, but—" And then we try and chop that "but" to pieces; but after a while they find another, and say, "Yes, I now see that point, but—" So they buttress their unbelief with "buts." If anybody here should be wishful to give you a thousand pounds, can you tell me any reason why he should not? Well, I fancy if he were to come to you and present you with a bank note for that amount you would not worry yourself to discover objections. You would not keep on saying, "I should like the money, but—" No, if there were any reason why you should not have it, you would let other people find it out. You would not labour and cudgel your brains to try and find out arguments against yourself; you are not so much your own enemy. And yet with regard to eternal life, which is infinitely more precious than all the treasures of this world, men act most absurdly and say, "I earnestly desire it, and Christ is able to do it, but—" What folly is this to argue against yourself. If a man were in Newgate condemned to die, and had to stand upon the drop to-morrow morning, and the sheriff came and said, "There is a free pardon for you," do you think that man would begin to object? Would he cry, "I should like another half-hour to consider my case, and find out reasons why I should not be pardoned"? No, he would jump at it. Oh that you may also jump at the pardon to-night. The Lord grant that you may feel such a sense of danger and guilt, that you may promptly cry, "I do believe; I will believe in Jesus."

Sinners are not half as sensible as sparrows. David said in one of the Psalms, "I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop." Well, have you noticed the sparrow? He keeps his eyes open, and the moment he sees a grain of wheat or anything to eat down in the road, he flies to get it. I never knew him wait for someone to invite him, much less to beg and beseech him to come and feed. He sees the food and he says to himself, "Here is a hungry sparrow, and there is a piece of bread. Those two things go well together, they shall not be long apart." Down he flies, and eats up all he can find as fast as he finds it. Oh, if you had half the sense of the sparrow you would say, "Here is a guilty sinner, and there is a precious Saviour. These two things go well together, they shall not be long apart. I believe in Jesus and Jesus is mine."

The Lord grant that you may find Jesus to-night before you leave this house. I pray you may. In these very pews and aisles may you look to Jesus Christ and believe. Faith is only a look, a look of simple trust. It is reliance, a believing that he is able to do this, and a trusting in him to do it and to do it now. God bless every one of you, and may we meet in heaven, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew ix. 18—38.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—100, 539, 555.

No. 1,356.

new birth or the work of the Holy Spirit, and he states it quite as plainly as the other grand truth. See how they blend—"Ye must be born again;" but "whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life;" "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" but "he that believeth on him is not condemned." Two great truths are written in letters of light over the gate of heaven, as the requisites of all who enter there—*Reconciliation by the blood of Jesus Christ; and Regeneration by the work of the Holy Ghost.* We must not put one of these truths before the other, nor allow one to obliterate or hide the other: they are of equal importance, for they are revealed by the same divine Spirit, and are alike needful to eternal salvation. He who cares to preach either of these ought also diligently to teach the other, lest he be found guilty of violating that salutary precept, "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Avoid all neglect of faith, and equally shun all undervaluing of the work of the Holy Ghost, so shall you find that narrow channel in which the way of truth doth lie. You must rest in Christ that you may be accepted before God, but the work of the Holy Spirit within you is absolutely needful that you may be able to have communion with the pure and holy God. Faith gives us the rights of the children of God, but the new birth must be experienced that we may have the nature of children: of what use would rights be if we had not the capacity to exercise them?

Now it is of the work of the Spirit of God, and of the man in whom the Spirit of God has worked, that I shall speak this morning, according to the tenor of the text. The text may be read two ways. First it may evidently refer to *the Holy Spirit himself*. Do you not expect the text to run thus—"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so also is the Spirit of God"? Is not that the way in which you naturally expect the sentence to end? Yes, and I doubt not that such was really the Saviour's meaning; but frequently according to the New Testament idiom the truth is not stated as our English modes of speech would lead us to expect: for instance, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that sowed good seed in his ground." Now the kingdom is not like the man, but like the whole transaction of the parable in which the man is the principal actor. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls," but the kingdom is not like the man, but the comparison runs into all that the man does. So here the Lord Jesus lays hold of one grand sphere of the Spirit's operations and puts it down, intending, however, a wider sense. There are certain readings of our text which would make this more clear if we could think them allowable, as for instance that which does not render the Greek word by "wind" at all, but translates it "spirit," and makes it run, "The Spirit bloweth where he listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof." I do not adopt that reading, but there are several great authorities in its favour, and this tends to show that our first head is correct. When we have spoken upon that we will take the language in its second sense, in reference to *the regenerate man*, and then we read, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth:

is every man that is born of the Spirit": he himself, like the Spirit which he is born, is free, and is mysterious in his ways, but discerned by the sound of his works and life.

I. Take the text in reference to THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF. The figure is the wind, and, as most of you know, the Hebrew word for "wind" and for "spirit" is the same; and it is interesting to note that the same is true with the Greek word "*pneuma*," which signifieth both "breath" and "spirit," so that the figure which the Saviour used might very naturally grow out of the word which he employed. The wind is air in motion, and is, of course, material; but air is apparently more spiritual than any of the other elements, except fire, since it is not to be grasped by the hand nor seen with the eye. It is certain that wind really exists, for we hear the sound thereof and observe its various effects, but it is not to be touched, handled, or gazed upon; men cannot traffic in it, or measure it in scales, or weigh it in balances. We may watch for hours as we will the clouds as they hasten along like winged fowl, but the wind which driveth them is out of our sight; we observe the waves roused to fury in the tempest, but the breath which so excites them we cannot see. Hence the word becomes all the more excellent a figure of that mighty power, the Holy Ghost, of whose existence no man ever doubts who has come under his influence, but who, nevertheless, is not to be tracked in his movements, nor to be seen as to his divine person; for he is mysterious, incomprehensible, and divine.

The metaphor of the wind cannot fully set forth the Holy Spirit, as you know; and, consequently, many other natural figures are employed, such as fire, dew, water, light, oil, and so on, in order to exhibit all the phases of his influence; but still the wind is a most instructive metaphor as far as it goes, and as we cannot draw forth all its teaching in one sermon let us be content to keep as closely as we can to the text.

First, the wind is a figure of the Holy Ghost in *its freeness*—"The wind bloweth where it listeth." We speak of the wind as the very image of freedom: we say to those who would enthrall us, "go bind the winds," as for ourselves, we claim to be "free as the winds which roam at their own will." No one can fetter the wind. Xerxes threw chains into the Hellespont to bind the sea, but even he was not fool enough to talk of forging fetters for the winds. The breezes are not to be dictated to. Cæsar may decree what he pleases, but the wind will blow in his face if he looks that way. The Pope may command the gale to change its course, but it will blow around the Vatican neither less nor more for the holy father and the cardinals. A conference of plenipotentiaries from all the powers of Europe may sit for a week and resolve unanimously that the east wind shall not blow for the next six months, but it will take no heed of the arrangement, and will cast dust into the counsellors' eyes, and whistle at their wisdom. No proclamation nor purpose under heaven will be able to affect the wind by so much as half a point of the compass. It will blow according to its own sweet will, where it pleases, when it pleases, how it pleases, and as it pleases, for "the wind bloweth where it listeth." So is it, only in a far higher and more emphatic sense, with the Holy Spirit, for he is most free and absolute. Ye know that the wind is in the hand of God, and that he ordaineth every zephyr and each tornado: winds arise and

tempests blow by order from the throne supreme; but as for the Holy Spirit, he is God himself, and absolutely free, and worketh according to his own will and pleasure amongst the sons of men. One nation has been visited by the Holy Spirit and not another—who shall tell me why? Why lie yon heathen lands in the dense darkness while on Britain the light is concentrated? Why has the Reformation taken root in England and among the northern nations of Europe, while in Spain and Italy it has left scarce a trace? Why blows the Holy Spirit here and not there? Is it not that he doeth as he wills? “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” is the declaration of the divine sovereignty, and the Spirit of God in his movements confirmeth it. Among the nations where the Spirit of God is at work how is it that he bleaseth one man and not another? How is it that of two men hearing the same sermon, and subject to the same influences at home, one is taken and the other left? Two children nursed at the same breast, and trained by the same parents, grow up to different ends. He who perishes in sin has no one to blame but himself, but he who is saved ascribes it all to grace—why came that grace to him? We never dare to lay the fault of man’s not repenting and believing upon God—that resteth with the evil will which refused to obey the gospel; but we dare not ascribe the saving difference in the case of the one who believes to any natural goodness in himself, but we attribute it all to the grace of God, and believe that the Holy Spirit worketh in such to will and to do according to his own good pleasure. But why works he in us? Why in any of the chosen? Ah, why? “The wind bloweth where it listeth.”

So, too, is it with the blessing which rests upon ministries. One man winneth souls to God, and as a joyous reaper returneth with full sheaves, but another who goeth forth with strong desires, and seems at least to be as earnest as his fellow, comes home with a scanty handful of ears, which he has painfully gleaned. Why is one man’s net full of fish and another’s utterly empty? One servant of the Lord seems, whenever he stands up to preach the gospel, to attract men to Jesus as though he had golden chains in his mouth which he did cast about men’s hearts to draw them in joyful captivity to his Lord, while another cries in bitterness of soul, “Who hath believed our report?” Truly, “the wind bloweth where it listeth.” Ay, and these changes happen to each man severally: one day the preacher shall be all alive, his spirit shall be stirred within him, and he shall speak evidently with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and to-morrow he shall find himself dull and heavy, even to his own consciousness, and even more so to his people’s experience, for the power rests not upon him. One day he speaketh like the voice of God, and another day he is but as a reed shaken of the wind. His fat kine of years gone by are devoured by the lean cattle of the present. He has his famine as well as his plenty. You shall see him come forth to-day with the unction of the Lord upon him, and his face shining with the glory of fellowship with the Most High, and to-morrow he shall say, “Look not upon me, for I am black,” for the glory shall have departed. We know what it is to come forth like Samson when his locks were shorn; and to shake ourselves as at other times and discover that the Lord is not with us. Why all this?

Is it not because "the wind bloweth where it listeth"? The Holy Spirit, for his own wise reasons, puts not forth an equal power upon any man at all times. We cannot control nor command the Spirit of the living God : he is in the highest sense a free agent. "Thy free Spirit" is a name which David gave him, and a most appropriate name it is.

Yet, beloved, do not fall into a misapprehension. The Holy Ghost is absolutely free in his operations, but he is not arbitrary ; he doeth as he wills, but his will is infallible wisdom. The wind, though we have no control over it, hath a law of its own, and the Holy Ghost is a law unto himself ; he doeth as he wills, but he willeth to do evermore that which is for the best. Moreover, we know with regard to the wind that there are certain places where you will almost always find a breeze : not here, in the teeming city, nor down in the valley shut in by the mountains, nor on yonder steaming marsh ; but lift up your eyes to the hills, and mark how the breeze courses along the downs, and sweeps the summits of the mountain ranges. In the morning and the evening, when the inland air is hot as an oven, gentle winds come to and from the sea and fan the fisher's cheek : you may find places where the air seems always stagnant and men's hearts grow heavy amid the feverish calm, but there are elevated hillsides where life is easy, for the air exhilarates by its perpetual freshness. Brethren, among lively saints, in the use of the means of grace, in private prayer, in communion with the Lord, you will find the wind that bloweth where it listeth always in motion.

The wind too hath at least in some lands its times and seasons. We know that at certain times of the year we may expect winds, and if they come not to a day or two, yet, as a rule, the month is stormy ; and there are also trade winds, monsoons which blow with remarkable regularity and are counted upon by mariners. And so with the Spirit of God. We know that at certain times he visits the churches, and under certain conditions puts forth his power. If, for instance, there is mighty prayer, you may be sure the Spirit of God is at work ; if the people of God meet together and besiege the throne of grace with cries and tears, the spiritual barometer indicates that the blessed wind is rising. Besides, the Holy Spirit has graciously connected himself with two things, truth and prayer. Preach the truth, publish the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is the habit of the Holy Spirit to make the word quick and powerful to the hearts of men. If we falsify his word, if we keep back part of the truth, if we become unfaithful, we cannot expect the Holy Spirit to bless us ; but if our teaching be Christ crucified, lovingly set forth, and if the grace of God in its fulness be really declared, the Holy Spirit will attend the truth and make it the great power of God. I will not say that it is always, and without exception so, but I think exceptions must be rare ; almost invariably the Spirit beareth witness with the truth in the conversion of men. So too with prayer, the Holy Spirit is pleased to connect himself with that also, if it be believing prayer. Here the connection is exceedingly intimate, because it is the Spirit of God who himself gives the believing prayer, and it is not only true that the Spirit will be given in answer to prayer, but the Spirit is already given or the believing prayer would never have been offered. The spirit of prayerfulness, the spirit of anxiety for the conversion of men

is one of the surest indications that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the minds of his people.

Coming back, however, to the great fact that we cannot command the Holy Spirit, what influence ought that truth to have upon us? Should it not be just this? It should lead us to be very tender and jealous in our conduct towards the Holy Ghost, so that we do not grieve him and cause him to depart from us. Vex not the Spirit. When you enjoy his gracious operations be devoutly grateful, and walk humbly before God, that you may retain them; and when he is at work let not negligence on your part cause you to receive the grace of God in vain. The wind blew, but the sailor was asleep; it was a favourable breeze, but he had cast anchor and his barque moved not. If he had but known it all through the night he would have spread his sail and have made good headway towards his port; but he slumbered, and the blessed wind whistled through the cordage and the ship lay idle at its moorings. Let it not be so with us. Never suffer the Spirit of God to be with us and find us regardless of his presence. In the olden times, when country people depended more than they do now on the use of the windmill to grind their corn, some parishes would be half-starved, when week after week there had been no wind. The miller would look up anxiously, and everybody in the parish would become a watchman for his sails, hoping that they would soon be set in motion. If the breeze stirred at the dead of night, and the miller was sound asleep, somebody or other would run and knock him up. "The wind is blowing, the wind is blowing, grind our corn." So it ought to be whenever the Spirit of God is vigorously working in his church, we should eagerly avail ourselves of his power. We should be so anxious for his divine operations that all should be on the watch, so that if some did not discover it others would, and observant ones would cry, "The Holy Ghost is working with us; let arise and labour more abundantly." Hoist sail when the wind favours; you cannot command it, therefore carefully value it.

But we must pass on. The Holy Spirit is described as being like the wind as to *his manifestations*. "Thou hearest," says Jesus, "the sound thereof." It has been suggested, and some have enlarged upon it, that there are many other manifestations of the presence of wind: you can feel it, you can see its results upon the trees and the waves, and sometimes you can be sure that the wind has been at work by the devastation which it has caused: but in this place our Saviour was not so much alluding to a great wind as to the gentler breezes. The Greek word "*pneuma*" is translated "breath," and can hardly be made to mean a tempest. It was a gentle wind like a zephyr of which the Lord was here speaking. The great winds, as I have already said, can be somewhat calculated upon, but if you sit in the garden in the cool of the evening it is utterly impossible for you to tell whence the zephyrs come and where they go; they are so volatile in their movements and untrackable in their course; here, there, everywhere the soft breezes of evening steal among the flowers. Our Lord tells us that such gentle zephyrs are heard: Nicodemus in the stillness of the night could hear them. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." The leaves rustle, and that is all; you hear a gentle movement of branch and stem, and as it were the tinkling of flower-bells, and so you discover that the wind is fitting

among the beds and borders. Now, beloved, this shows us that the hearing ear is intended by God to be the discernor of the Spirit to men, to the most of men the only discernor that they have. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." What a wonderful dignity the Lord has been pleased to put upon this little organ, the ear. The Romish church gives the preference always to the eye; her priests are always for astonishing men into grace with their wonderful performances; but God's way is "Faith cometh by hearing," and the first detector of the Holy Ghost is the ear. To some men this is the only revealer of his mysterious presence, as I have already said: they hear the sound thereof, that is to say, they hear the gospel preached, they hear the word of God read. Truth when it is couched in words is the rustling of the holy wind, it is the footstep of the Eternal Spirit as mysteriously he passes along a congregation. Oh, what grief it is that some never get any further than this, but abide where Nicodemus was at the first: they hear the sound thereof and nothing more. Some of you are now daily hearing truth which has saved thousands, but it does not save you; you are hearing the very truth which peoples heaven, but yet it leaves you without a hope of eternal life; yet be ye sure of this, the kingdom of God has come nigh unto you. "Thou hearest the sound thereof," and that wind whose whispers you hear is not far off thine own cheek. When thou hearest the rustling amongst the boughs of the trees the breezes are not far to seek, nor is the Spirit of God far away when his sound is heard.

Some hearers, however, go further, for they hear the sound of the Spirit in their consciences and it disturbs them; they would sleep as do others, but as the wind sometimes comes whistling through the key-hole or howls down the chimney and wakes the sluggard, or if the man be lying in a garden asleep the breezes play around his ears and face and startle him, so is it with many unconverted people; they cannot be quiet, for they hear the sound of the Holy Spirit in their consciences, and are troubled and perplexed. There is a revival and they are not saved, but they are startled and alarmed by it; their sister is converted, they are not, but still it comes very near them, and they feel as if an arrow had gone whizzing by their own ear. It is hard living in a careless state in the midst of revival. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." But some of you in your conscience are hearing the sound now in your family circle, from the fact that one after another of your relatives have been brought to know the Lord; you cannot avoid feeling that there is something powerful abroad, though it has not yet exerted its regenerating power upon you.

As for the man who is saved, he hears the Holy Spirit in the most emphatic sense, and with what variety that sound comes to him. At first he heard it as a threatening wind, which bowed him in sadness and seemed to sweep all his hopes to the ground, as the sere leaves of the forest are carried in the autumn's wind. When the Spirit's voice sounded in mine ears at the first it was as a wail of woe, as a wind among the tombs, as a sigh among faded lilies. It seemed as if all my hopes were puffed away like smoke, or as the night mists in the morning breeze; nothing was left me but to mourn my nothingness. Then I heard a sound as of the hot sirocco of the East,

as if it issued from a burning oven. You know the text, "The grass withereth and the flower thereof fadeth away, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass." In my soul there had bloomed a fair meadow of golden kingcups and fair flowers of many dainty colours, but the Spirit of God blew thereon and withered it all, and left it as a dry, brown, rusty plain, whereon was neither life nor comeliness. So far the sacred wind destroys that which is evil, but it ends not there, for we thank God we have heard the sound of the Spirit as a quickening wind. The prophet cried, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live"; the wind came and the dead arose an exceeding great army. The like miracle has been wrought on us. The sere bones of our own death have crept together, bone unto his bone, and flesh has come upon them, and now because of the divine breath we have begun to live. Now, also, when the Holy Spirit visits us he renews our life and energy, and we have life more abundantly. The Holy Spirit has since then been to us full often a melting wind, "He causeth his wind to blow and the waters flow." Locked up in the chains of ice all through the winter the waters are still as a stone, but the spring-winds come, the brooklets find liberty and leap away to the rivers, and the rivers flow in all their free force to add their volume to the sea. So hath the Spirit of God oftentimes broken up our frost, and given our spirits joyous liberty. He melts the rocky heart and dissolves the iron spirit, at the sound of his goings men are moved to feeling. We know the sound of this wind also as a diffusive breath, drawing forth and diffusing our slumbering graces. "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." Oh, what a sweet unloosing of holy gratitude, and love, and hope, and joy has there been in our heart when the Spirit of God has visited us. As sweet essences lie hidden in the flowers, and come not forth until the loving wind doth entice them to fly abroad, so do sweet graces lie within renewed spirits until the Holy Ghost cometh and speaketh to them, and they know his voice and come forth to meet him, and so sweet fragrances are shed abroad.

Yes, my brethren, all this we know, and we have heard the sound of the Holy Spirit in another sense, namely, as going forth with us to the battle of the Lord. We have heard that sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees which David heard, and we have bestirred ourselves, and victory has been ours. If we have not heard that rushing mighty wind which came at Pentecost, yet have we felt its divine effect, which ceaseth not, but still bringeth life, power, energy, and all that is wanted for the conversion of the sons of men to us who are bidden to go forth and preach the gospel amongst the nations. In all these respects the Holy Ghost has manifested himself, as wind does, by his sound. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." "Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."

A third likeness of the Spirit to the wind is set before us in the point of *mystery*. "Thou canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." Of the wind we may tell that it comes from such and such a quarter or point, but you cannot put your finger on the map and say, "The north wind began in this region," or "here the west wind was born." Indeed, we know very little about the winds, their origin, or

their laws. One of the best and most accurate observers of the wind during thirty years recorded every wind in his region, until at the end of the term he abandoned the few rules which he had laid down during the first two or three years, for he found that no rule held good. No man can say whence the wind leapeth forth. The heathen dreamed of a certain cave wherein the winds were enclosed as in a prison, and suffered to go abroad one by one : it was but a fable ; we know not where the winds first spread their wings, or where they sleep when all is still. So is it with the Holy Spirit in the mind of man, his first movements are hidden in mystery. You know that you are converted, my dear friend, and you know somewhere about the time, and probably you remember somewhat as to the means which the Lord used for your salvation. Those outward circumstances you do know, but how the Holy Spirit operated upon you you do not and cannot tell any more than you can tell how swells the life within the seed until it springs up and becomes the full corn in the ear, or how the sap in the trees first descendeth in the winter and afterwards climbeth again in the spring. There are secrets which nature doth not reveal, and the work of the Spirit is even more a secret, and assuredly no man can explain it to his fellow or to himself. Why is it, my friend, that you obtained a blessing under one sermon but not under another, and yet when you spoke to your sister she had been more blessed under the second than the first ? The power does not come from the preacher, then, it is clear, and " thou canst not tell whence it cometh." There are times in which you feel not only that you can pray but that you must pray ; how come you to be in that state ? I know what it is to feel in a very ecstasy of delight in the Lord, for which I can scarcely account, for at another time when I have been engaged in the same work, and I think with the same earnestness, I have not been conscious of any such exceeding delight in God. At one time the heart will be full of penitence as if it would break for sin, and at another season it will overflow with such delight in Christ that the sin seems almost forgotten in the pardoning sacrifice. Why these diverse operations ? We know what it is at times to feel such a sense of death upon us as to be earnestly preparing for our last hours ; and at another time to be altogether forgetful of death, and to be living, as it were, the immortal life already, raised up together and made to sit together with Christ. But how these various modes and forms and workings of the Spirit come who among us shall tell ? Go trace the dewdrops, if ye can, to the womb of the morning, and discover which way went the lightning's flash, or how the thunder rolled along the mountain tops, but ye cannot tell nor can you guess whence cometh the Spirit of God into your souls.

Nor can we tell whither it goeth. Here, again, is another mystery. Oh, it charms me to think that when we let loose the truth in the power of the Spirit we never know where it will fly. A child takes a seed, one of those little downy seeds which has its own parachute to bear it through the air ; the little one blows it into the air, but who knows where that downy seed shall settle, and in whose garden it shall grow ? Such is truth, even from the mouths of babes and sucklings. Whole continents have been covered with strange flowers simply by the wind wafting foreign seeds thither, and mariners have discovered sunny islets out there

in the Southern Sea, where foot of man has never trodden, covered with abundance of vegetation which the wind has by degrees wafted thither. Scatter the truth on all sides, for you cannot tell where the Spirit will carry it. Fling it to the winds, and you shall find it after many days. Scatter the living seed with both hands, send it north, south, east, and west, and God will give it wings.

"Waft, waft ye winds the story,
And you, ye waters roll,
Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole."

I had a letter but the other day when I was sore sick : it was written by a sister in Christ in the very heart of the empire of Brazil. She said that she had met with a copy of my "Morning Readings," and had found thereby the way of peace, and, therefore, she wrote me such a loving, touching letter, that, as I read it, it brought tears to my eyes. There was something more affecting yet, for at the end was written in another hand, some words to the effect that his dear wife who had written the above letter had died soon after finishing it, and with a bleeding heart the lone husband sent it on to me, rejoicing that ever the word came to his wife's soul in the far-off land. Brethren, you do not know where the word will go and the Spirit with it. In Bohemia the papists thought they had stamped out the gospel, and with cruel edicts they kept down all thought of Protestantism, but just lately, since the toleration, the gospel has been preached in that country, and to the surprise of everybody there have come forward men and women from lone cottages in the woods and from different corners of the great cities of Bohemia, bringing with them ancient copies of the word of God, themselves being eager to know the precious truth for which they remember that their fathers died. A truth will go adown the centuries : like the river, it sings

"Men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever."

"Thou canst not tell whither it goeth," it will travel on till the millennium. Send that saying abroad that the truth cannot die. The persecutor cannot kill it, it is immortal, like the God who sent it forth ; the persecutor cannot even stay its course, it is divine. Popery will always be in danger so long as there is one leaf of the Bible upon earth, or one man living who knows the Saviour. Antichrist cannot triumph ; the Holy Spirit wars against it with the sword of the word, and thou canst not tell how far into the heart of error any truth may be driven. To the overthrow of falsehood and the death of sin the Spirit speeds on, but thou knowest not how.

"Thou canst not tell whither it goeth" either in any one heart. If you have received the Holy Spirit into your heart, you cannot tell whither he will carry you. I am sure that William Carey, when he gave his young heart to Christ never thought the Spirit of God would carry him to Serampore to preach the gospel to the Hindoos ; and when George Whitefield first drank of the life-giving spirit it never occurred to him that the pot-boy at the Bell Inn at Gloucester would thunder the gospel over two continents and turn thousands to Christ. No!

You know not to what blessed end this wind will waft you. Commit yourselves to it : be not disobedient to the heavenly vision ; be ready to be borne along as the Spirit of God shall help you, even as the dust in the summer's breeze. And O child of God, you do not yourself know to what heights of holiness and degrees of knowledge and ecstasies of enjoyment the Spirit of God will bear you. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," and though he hath revealed them by his Spirit (for the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God), yet even to the best taught child of God it is not yet known to the full whither the Spirit of God goeth. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength," and he will bear you onward and upward, even to perfection itself, and you shall be with Jesus, where he is, and behold his glory.

II. I have but a few minutes left for my second head, but I do not need many, since I do not wish to say much upon it. The text relates to THOSE WHO ARE BORN OF THE SPIRIT. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The birth partakes of the nature of the parent. That which is born of the Spirit is like unto the Spirit of which it is born, even as that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and is similar to the flesh by which it is begotten. The twice-born man is like the Holy Ghost who produced him, and he is like him in each of the points which we have already dwelt upon. As to *freedom*, you may say of him, "He bloweth where he listeth." The Spirit of God makes the believer a free man, bestows on him the freedom of his will which he never had before, and gives him a delightful consciousness of liberty. "If the Son make you free ye shall be free indeed." I do not affirm that every spiritual man does as he lists, because, alas, I see another law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin and death : but still, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Now you can pray, which you could not do before ; now you can praise, though you could not extract a note of praise from your ungrateful heart before ; now you can cry, "Abba, Father ;" now you can draw near to God. You are no longer under man's control, you blow where you list ; you are not now ruled by priest-craft, nor domineered over by the opinion of your fellow-man. The Lord has set you free, and you list to go where God's word bids you go, and you find the utmost liberty in going that way. Oh, brethren, I cannot tell you the change which is felt by a regenerate man in the matter of spiritual liberty. When you were under the bondage of the law, of custom and of sin, and of fear of death and dread of hell, you were like a man shut up in one of those cells in Venice which lie below the level of the water mark, where the air is foul, and the poor prisoner can only stir half-a-dozen feet and then walk back again in the darkness ; but when the Spirit of God comes he brings the soul from darkness into light, from clammy damp into the open air ; he sets before you an open door, he helps you to run in the ways of God's commands, and as if that were not enough, he even lends you wings, and bids you mount as the eagle, for he has set you free.

Again, the man who is born of the Spirit is somewhat *manifested*; and is known by his sound. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." The most ungodly man if he lives near a Christian will hear the sound of him. The secret life within will speak; words there will be, for Christians are not dumb, but actions will speak more loudly still; and even apart from actions the very spirit and tone of the man who is really regenerated will speak, and the ungodly man will be compelled to hear it. "Thou hearest the sound thereof."

And now notice *the mystery* there is about a Christian. Thou knowest nothing, if thou art unregenerate, about the life the believer leads, for he is dead, and his life is hid with Christ in God. Thou knowest not whence he cometh forth in the morning; those beds of spices which have made his garments fragrant thou hast not seen; that weeping in prayer or that rejoicing in fellowship with which he opened the morning thou knowest nothing of, and thou canst not know until thou art thyself born of the Spirit. Neither canst thou tell whither the spiritual man goeth. In the midst of his trouble thou seest him calm; dost thou know where he went to win that rare quietude? In the hour of death thou seest him triumphant; dost thou know where he has been to learn to die so joyously? No, the unregenerate man knows not whither the believer goes. There is a secret place of the Most High, and they shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty who have once learned to enter there, but carnal men come not into this secret chamber. The Christian life is a mystery all through, from its beginning to its end: to the worldling all a mystery, and to the Christian himself a puzzle. He cannot read his own riddle, nor understand himself. This one thing he knoweth, "Whereas I was once blind, now I see"; this also he knoweth, "O Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds"; this also he knoweth, that when his Lord shall be revealed then will he also shine forth as the sun. The life within him in its coming and going is all a mystery to him, but he blesses God that he has fellowship therein. He goes on his way feeling that though men know not whence he is, nor whither he is going, yet the Lord knows him, and he himself is sure that he is going to his Father and his God. O that every one of you had so delightful a hope. The Lord grant it to you, for Jesus' sake.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John ii. 23—25;

iii. 1—23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—166, 445, 448.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A BUSINESS-LIKE ACCOUNT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 3RD, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."—Philippians iii. 7—9.

OUR Saviour's advice to those who wished to be his disciples was "Count the cost." He did not wish to entice any man to enlist in his army by keeping him in ignorance as to the requirements of his service. Again and again he tested professed converts himself, and he frequently exhorted men to try themselves, lest they should begin a profession and be unable to maintain it. True religion is a matter of enthusiasm, but at the same time its truths and precepts can endure the severest examination. The exercise of our judgments upon the gospel is invited, yea required. It is true that many persons are brought to Christ in earnest assemblies, where they are addressed in fervent language; but yet a man may sit down in his study or his counting house with his pen in his hand, and in the coolest possible manner he may calculate, and, if under the Holy Spirit's guidance he shall be led to calculate truthfully, he will come to the conclusion that the cause of the Lord Jesus is worthiest and best. Do not imagine, as some do, that religion consists in a wild fanaticism which never considers, calculates, judges, estimates, or ponders; for such an imagination will be the reverse of truth. Ardour, fervour, enthusiasm, these are desirable, and we cannot well have too much of them; but at the same time, as I have already said, we can justify our attachment to Christ by the calmest logic, by the most patient consideration. We may make a lengthy and deliberate estimate, taking both things temporal and things eternal into review, and yet we may challenge all gainsayers while we declare that it is the wisest and the best thing in all the world to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Nos. 1,357-8.

In our text the apostle gives us the word "count" three times over. He was skilled in spiritual arithmetic, and very careful in his reckoning. He cast up his accounts with caution, and observed with a diligent eye his losses and his gains. In his reckoning he does not ignore any losses that may be supposed to be sustained, or really may be sustained; and he does not, on the other hand, for a moment forget that blessed gain for which he counts it worth while to suffer surprising loss. Paul here seems to be in a mercantile frame of mind, adding and subtracting, counting and balancing, with much quiet and decision of mind. I commend the text to business men; I invite them to follow the apostle's example, to use their best judgments upon eternal things, to sit down, take out their pen and figure as he did, and make out estimates and calculations as to themselves and Christ, their own works and the righteousness of faith.

The subject this morning will be, first, *the apostle's calculations*; and secondly, *our own*: the object being in the second part to put questions to ourselves as to whether we estimate things after the apostolic fashion.

I. First, then, let us consider **THE APOSTLE'S CALCULATIONS**. Looking at the text, you will notice that he made three distinct countings; they all came to much the same thing, with this difference, that each one as it succeeded its fellow was more emphatic in its result: the result was the same, but it was more and more forcibly expressed.

And, first, we have his *counting at the outset of his Christian life*. When he became a believer, he says of himself, "what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." That is to say, at the first and earliest period when, from being Saul, the Rabbi, the intense Pharisee, he became Paul, the convert, and the preacher of the faith which once he destroyed, those things which to himself had seemed very splendid gains all dissolved into one great loss. At that time he says he made a calculation and formed a deliberate opinion that what had appeared to him to be most advantageous was really, so far as Christ was concerned, a positive disadvantage and hindrance to him—the gains were a loss.

Now, you will notice that in this first calculation he dwelt upon the separate items, noting each with great distinctness. The list of the things whereof he might glory in the flesh reads like a catalogue. "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." These are the things which were gains to him, and the list is very comprehensive, beginning at his birth and circumcision and running right on to the date of his conversion. He dwells with a high degree of interest upon the items of his Jewish advantages: they had been as precious pearls to him once, and while he freely renounces them, he yet remembers that they were once dear as the apple of his eye. They had been his pride, his patent of nobility, and his daily boast. He felt himself to be in these respects far in advance of the most of mankind, and second to none, even of his favoured race, for even now, he says, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." "Circumcised the eighth day":—the rite which introduced him to the outward covenant of Abraham had been performed exactly when

ordained by the law. He was not one who had been circumcised as proselytes were, late in life, nor at an irregular season on account of ill health, travelling, or parental neglect; but to the moment as the Mosaic ritual required he had as a babe been received into the congregation of Israel. Next, he was of "the stock of Israel," he was not one who had been converted to the Israelitish faith, nor a descendant of Gibeonites or of proselyted parents, but he was of the pure stock of Israel, descended by a clear line, which probably he was able genealogically to trace, from that Israel who was a prevailing prince with God. He was proud of this descent, and well he might be, for every Jew is of noble lineage. Speak of ancient families who can match the seed of Israel! Theirs is the best blood in the universe, if one blood be better than another.

Paul also boasted that he was "of the tribe of Benjamin": the tribe which Moses called the beloved of the Lord, the tribe within whose canton the temple stood: the tribe which was descended from the beloved wife of Jacob, even Rachel, and not from the sons of either of the bondwomen. The tribe of Benjamin was that from which the first king of Israel was chosen, and he bore the same name as that by which Paul had been known among his Jewish brethren. Paul was, therefore, of the very choicest branch of that vine which the Lord himself brought out of Egypt.

He next adds that he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"; he was the cream of the cream, the very pick and choice out of the choice nation and the elect people. If there was any benefit to be had by being of the seed of Abraham, the Hebrew, he had all that benefit in the highest possible degree. Then he had appended to all the advantages of birthright and of nationality that of entering into a peculiar sect, the most orthodox, the most devout—for "as touching the law he was a Pharisee," and belonged to the sect which attached importance to the minutest details of the law, and tithed its mint and its anise, and its cummin. What more could he be? He was a Jesuit among the Catholics, one who went to the extreme among extremists, one of those initiated into the innermost secrets of the faith. Then, as to personal character, he felt that here in his natural state he had something which was gain, for he was so full of zeal that those who appeared to speak against the law of Moses by declaring the gospel were counted as his enemies, whom he hunted down with all his might—"concerning zeal, persecuting the church." This he had done in all honesty of purpose as the result of his thorough self-righteousness. He finishes by saying that he himself was as to every detail of the law, every little point of ritual, and every particular rubric, altogether blameless. This was no small thing to say, but he spake no more than the truth. These things all put together are what he counted gains (for the Greek word is in the plural), and I think he dwells somewhat lingeringly upon each separate point, as very well he might, for they had been very dear to him in former days, and these privileges were in themselves things of no mean worth.

But now, what was to be set on the other side? Here is a long list on one side, what is to be placed *per contra*? He says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." What! What!

Nothing on the other side but one item! One? One only? and yet there were so many privileges on the other side! There was but one name, one person in that scale, while in the other there were so many advantages! Why, one begins to think that the calculation will soon come to an end in favour of Saul's Israelitish descent, and the rest of it: but not so, the one outweighed the many. Here I want you to notice that Paul does not say that those he counted loss for Christianity, or for the church, or for the orthodox faith. There would have been truth in such a statement, but the centre of the truth lies here—he counted these things loss *for Christ*, that is, for the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He thought of that divine one, blessed be his name, that brother of our souls who was born at Bethlehem, the Kinsman, Redeemer of his people; Christ, the living, loving, bleeding, dying, buried, risen, ascended, glorified Christ; this was the glorious person whom he placed on the other side of the balance-sheet. And now see the result. He says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss." A singular result. Not only that after putting the one under the other, and making a subtraction, he found that all his carnal advantages were less than Christ; but, far more than this, he found those gains actually transformed into a loss. They were not a *plus* on that side to stand in proportion to the *plus* on this side; but they were turned into a *minus* of actual deficit. He felt that his fleshly advantages, when he came to look at them in regard to Christ were disadvantages, and what he had reckoned to be gains operated rather against him than for him when he began to know Christ. My brethren, he does not mean that to be a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" was in itself a loss; nor that to be of the stock of Israel was a loss, for there was a natural advantage about all this. "What advantage then hath the Jew?" saith he in another place, and he replies, "Much every way:" but he meant that with respect to Christ those things which were naturally an advantage became a disadvantage, because their tendency had been to keep him from trusting Christ, and their tendency still was to tempt him away from simple faith in Jesus. "Alas!" he seemed to say to himself, "it was because I gloried that I was of the stock of Israel that I rejected the Christ of God; it was because I boasted that as touching the law I was blameless that therefore I refused to accept the glorious righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith. These advantages were scales upon my eyes to keep me from seeing the beauty of my Lord; these privileges were stumbling-blocks in my way to prevent my coming as a poor, humble, needy sinner and laying hold on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus." My brethren, it is a grand thing to have led a virtuous life: it is a matter for which to praise God to have been kept in the very centre of the paths of morality: but this blessing may by our own folly become a curse to us if we place our moral excellences in opposition to the righteousness of our Lord Jesus, and begin to dream that we have no need of a Saviour. If our character is in our own esteem so good that it makes a passable garment for us, and therefore we reject the robe of Christ's righteousness, it would have been better for us if our character had been by our own confession a mass of rags, for then we should have been willing to be clothed with the vesture which divine charity has prepared. Yea, better, so far as this matter is concerned, to be like

the open sinner, who will not readily be tempted that way, because he is too foul, too bankrupt to pretend to be righteous before God. I say again, he does not say that these things are not advantages, but that *for Christ*; and when he comes to look at them in the light of Christ, he regards them as being a loss rather than a gain. If I had this day a righteousness of my own, yet would I fling it to the winds to lay hold of the righteousness of Christ, fearing all the while lest so much as the smell of it should cling to my hand. Had I never sinned in one solitary open sin, and if but one secret transgression of my heart had ever been committed, yet would I loathe my righteousness as filthy rags, and only tremble lest my proud spirit should be so foolish as to cling to such a useless thing. Adam fell through one sin, and lost Paradise, and lost us all; so that one sin suffices to curdle the purest righteousness into utter sourness. Away, then, with the very shadow of self and legal righteousness.

But let us now proceed to notice that Paul gives us *his second calculation, which is his estimate for the time then present*. "Yea doubtless," saith he, "and I count"—not "I counted," as he said before, but "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." We are always anxious to hear what a man has to say about a thing after he has tried it. It is all very well to begin with eagerness, but how does the venture answer after a trial? After twenty years or more of experience Paul had an opportunity of revising his balance-sheet, and looking again at his estimates, and seeing whether or not his counting was correct. What was the issue of his latest search? How do matters stand at his last stock-taking? He exclaims with very special emphasis, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." The two words, "yea doubtless," are a very strong affirmation. He is speaking very positively as to his present confirmed assurance and established judgment. Look at him then, again, making his estimate to-day, after he has been for some time in the divine life, and has been made to suffer as the result of his earnest service. You perceive that he has not forgotten the things that *were* gains, for, as we have already seen, he has given us a detailed list of them. On this second occasion he does not repeat the catalogue, partly because there was no need for it, and partly because he cares less for each item, and mainly because for fear anything should have been omitted he succinctly sums up the whole by saying, "all things." He as good as says—yea doubtless, and I count as loss all the advantages of birth, nationality, and self-righteousness, which once I reckoned to be gains. If I have left out anything whereof as an Israelite I might have gloried, I beg you to insert it in the list, for I mean that all should be included when I say that I count all things but loss for Christ's sake.

So you see he has not altered the original summary, he has even made it more comprehensive, but he stands to the same estimate as ever: the gain is still "but loss"; only we perceive that now he dwells longer and evidently with greater delight of expression upon the other side, for now he uses not barely the word "Christ," but the fuller expression, "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Now he has come to *know* the Christ in whom before he

trusted. He spoke of him before as one for whom he counted gain as loss, but now he perceives so great an excellency in him that even to know him he reckons to be a super-eminent blessing. Our divine Lord is better loved as he is better known. The closer our inspection the greater is the manifest excellency of his character.

The words used by the apostle show us the points upon which he had the fullest knowledge. He knew the Lord as *Christ*, or as the Messiah, sent and anointed of the Father. He understood more fully than at the first the fulness, power, and exceeding efficacy of the anointing of our Lord which he had received above his fellows. He saw him to be the woman's promised seed, the coming one, the promised light of Israel, the ordained Prince and Saviour of the sons of men, and he saw all his qualifications for this wonderful character. He perceived his anointing as prophet, priest, and King. He delighted to see the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him, and descending from him to his people, as the sacred oil from the head of Aaron distilled to the skirts of his garments. He saw great excellency in the knowledge of the Lord's anointed, whose garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia; but this was not all, for he proceeds to call him *Jesus*, Christ Jesus. "Thou shalt call his name *Jesus* : for he shall save his people from their sins." Paul knew him as the anointed Saviour, yea, as the actual Saviour who had saved him : saved him from the madness of his blasphemy and persecution, saved him from all his past guilt, saved him and made him to be an instrument of the salvation of others. He delights in the title of Saviour, as we all do who know the savour of it. How sweetly musical is the name of Jesus ; how fragrant is it even as ointment poured forth. Excellent indeed is the knowledge of our Lord in this character.

How delicious is the apostle's next word, "*my Lord* ;" not merely the Lord, but "*my Lord*." His knowledge was an appropriating knowledge. He knew the Redeemer as anointed for him, as saving him, as Lord over all for him, and now as Lord to him. The honey of the sentence lies in that word "*my*." I do not know how it seems to your hearts, but to me it is one of the sweetest words that can possibly be used by mortal lip, "the knowledge of Christ Jesus *my Lord*." Whether he is your Lord or not, yet is he surely mine, whether he be accepted as Lord by the sons of men or not, yet is he joyfully owned as Lord to me and master of my spirit, sole monarch of my whole nature,—"*Christ Jesus my Lord*." You see, then, how truly, fully, practically, and personally he knew the Lord Jesus.

The text implies that he knew him *by faith*. He had seen him after the flesh, but in that he did not glory, for he had now come to value only the things of faith, desiring mainly that the righteousness which is of God by faith might be imputed unto him. He believed, and hence he knew. There is no knowledge so gracious as the knowledge of faith, for a man may know a great deal in a natural way and yet perish, but that which comes of faith is saving. If a man only knows Christ in the head, but does not trust him with the heart, what is the good of his knowledge ? It will rather ruin than save him. So to know the Lord Jesus Christ as to lean your soul's full weight upon him, so to know him as to experience peace because you trust in him, so to know him as to feel that

you can rest in him more and more, from day to day, because he is all your salvation and all your desire,—this is to know him indeed! But Paul also knew the Lord by *experience*, for he speaks of knowing him and “the power of his resurrection.” This is excellent knowledge indeed, when the power of a fact is realised within and shown in the life. When we are raised from the death of our sin, and feel that we are so, then is our knowledge of the risen Christ excellent indeed. When we feel a new life within us, quickening us unto spiritual things, and know that this springs from the resurrection of our Lord, and is wrought in us according to the mighty power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead, then indeed can we rejoice in the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

More than that, Paul knew something of Christ, and was aiming to know more, by a *growing likeness to him*: “that I may know him, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” He had entered, in some measure, into his Master’s sufferings, he had been persecuted and despised of men, and for much the same reason as his Master. He had, in a degree, felt Christ’s motives, Christ’s love for man, Christ’s zeal for God, Christ’s self-sacrifice, Christ’s readiness to die on behalf of the truth. This is an excellent knowledge indeed, and Paul might well esteem it as far more precious than all legal privileges. He spoke of it as super-eminent knowledge, for such is his meaning, and he reckoned it to be beyond all price. Beloved, there is no knowledge in the world which can be compared with such a knowledge of Christ Jesus as I have tried to describe just now, for it is a knowledge which concerns the highest conceivable object—even the Son of God. To know the science of nature, to be familiar with rocks, to read the stars, to comprehend all things else, is a comparative trifle when we consider what it is to know God in the person of the Lord Jesus. He in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily is most worthy to be known, and angels and principalities unite with all the saints in thinking so. One truth about Christ is more precious than the total of all other knowledge! This is a knowledge which no man hath except it be given him by the Holy Spirit—and hence its excellence. We may say to all, who know Christ, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee.” Divinely taught must he be who has learned Christ. This science cannot be acquired in the schools, nor imparted by learned professors, nor even gathered by years of diligent research: to the heart, renewed by the Holy Ghost, the Lord Jesus must be revealed by the Spirit himself, for no man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord but by the Holy Ghost. That must needs be a superlative knowledge which requires in each case to be communicated by God himself.

If you would see the excellency of this knowledge look at its effects. Some knowledge puffs up, but this knowledge makes us humble, and the more we have of it the less are we in our own esteem. This knowledge sanctifies, purges, and delivers from the love of sin. It saves the soul,—saves it from present sin and from eternal woe. This knowledge elevates the motives, sweetens the feelings, and gives nobility to the entire life: for the man who knows Christ lives after a loftier order of life than those who are ignorant of him. This knowledge indeed,

beloved, is excellent, because it never can be lost; it is a knowledge which will continue to progress, even in eternity. The most of the subjects which mortals study here will be forgotten in the world to come; the profoundest of them will be too trifling to be pursued amid angelic thrones. The honours of classical and mathematical attainments shine but dimly amidst the glories of heaven, but the knowledge of Christ Jesus will still be priceless, and it will cause those who possess it to shine as the sun. He that knoweth Christ shall go on to sit at the feet and still to learn, and as he learns he will tell to principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ. See ye, then, beloved, that the apostle for the sake of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord still counted all the things that he had once gloried in to be but loss. This was his calculation when he was writing. It was not merely the estimate of his younger days, but it was his present renewed and confirmed judgment. My friends, is it ours?

The great apostle gives us a third counting, which may be regarded as *his life estimate*; not of the past only, nor of the present merely, but of the past and present inclusively. Here it is "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him." Here, beloved, you see that his estimate sets out with actual test and practical proof. He is sitting down, I suppose, in the guard room of the Prætorium at Rome, where he was a prisoner; the chains are on his wrist, and if he likes he needs blotting paper, but may powder his writing with the rust of his fetters. He has nothing in all the world; he has lost all his old friends; his relations disown him, his countrymen abhor him, and even his Christian brethren often distress him. No name made the Jew glad; his teeth more maliciously than did the name of Saul of Tarsus, were adjudged to be the vilest of renegades. He has lost caste, and lost all ground of glorying, he has no longer a righteousness of his own wherein to glory, but he is stripped of every rag of legal hope. Christ is his all, and he has nothing else. He has no worldly property, he has no provision for his commonest needs, and most true are his words as he writes—"For whom I have suffered the loss of all things." Let us enter the prison and put a personal question to this good man. Paul, your faith has brought you to absolute penury and friendlessness: what is your estimate of it now? Theory is one thing, but does practice bear it out? The sea looks smooth as glass, but seafaring is pleasanter to talk of than to practise. The embarkation was a fine spectacle; but what think you of a sea voyage when the storm rages? How now, Paul? "Well," saith he, "I confess I have suffered the loss of all things." And do you deeply regret it, Paul? "Regret it," saith he, "regret the loss of my Phariseeism, my circumcision, my Israelitish dignity? Regret it! No," he says, "I am glad that all these are gone, for I count it to be a deliverance to be rid of them."

In his first and second countings he called his former gains loss, but now he sets them down as "dung." He could not use a stronger word; he calls all his boastings in the flesh mere offal—something to get rid of, and no loss when it is gone, but rather a subject for congratulation that

it is removed from him. The word signifies that which is worthless, and is used to express the lees and dregs of wine, the settlement which a man finds in his cup, and drains out upon the ground when he has drunk his liquor, the refuse of fruit, the dross of metals, and the chaff and stubble of wheat. In fact, the root of the word signifies things cast to dogs,—dog's meat, bones from the plates, crumbs and stale pieces brushed from the table, and such things as one is anxious to be rid of. The apostle puts down the whole of the fine things which he had enumerated as no better than dung. "Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews," he shakes out the whole lot for the dogs, and is glad to be rid of it all for Christ's sake. It reminds me of a ship in a storm. When the captain leaves the harbour he has a cargo on board of which he takes great care, but when a tremendous wind is blowing and the ship labours, being too heavily laden, and there is great fear that she will not outride the storm, see how eagerly the sailors lighten the ship. They bring up from the hold with all diligence the very things which before they prized, and they seem rejoiced to heave them into the sea. Never men more eager to get than these are to throw away. There go the casks of flour, the bars of iron, the manufactured goods: overboard go valuable bales of merchandise; nothing seems to be worth keeping. How is this? Are not these things good? Yes, but not good to a sinking ship. Anything must go to save life, anything to outride the storm. And so the apostle says that in order to win Christ and to be found in him he flung the whole cargo of his beloved confidences over, and was as glad to get rid of them as if they were only so much dung. This he did to win Christ, and that fact suggests another picture: an English war ship of the olden times is cruising the ocean, and she spies a Spanish galleon in the distance laden with gold from the Indies. Captain and men are determined to overtake and capture her, for they have a relish for prize-money; but their vessel sails heavily. What then? If she will not move because of her load they fling into the sea everything they can lay their hands on, knowing that if they can capture the Spanish vessel the booty will make amends for all they lose and vastly more. Do you wonder at their eagerness to lose the little to gain the great? Sailor, why cast overboard those useful things? "Oh," says he, "they are nothing compared with that prize over yonder. If we can but get side by side and board her we will soon make up for all that we now throw into the sea." And so it is with the man who is in earnest to win Christ and to be found in him. Overboard go circumcision and Phariseeism, and the blamelessness touching the law, and all that, for he knows that he will find a better righteousness in Christ than any which he foregoes, yea, find everything in Christ which he now for his Lord's sake counts but as the slag of the furnace.

Now, beloved, notice how much nearer Paul had got to Christ than he was before, for in his second estimate he spoke of knowing him, but now he speaks of *winning* him for his own. The word meant and should have been translated "gain," "that I may gain Christ," for the apostle keeps to the mercantile figure all the way through, and means that I may gain Christ, and know him as my own, that I may have him and hold him, and sing with the spouse "My beloved is mine."

For this cause we may wisely count all things but dung, that we may have the Lord Jesus in everlasting possession.

Then Paul adds "and be found in him." He longs to be hidden in Jesus, and to abide in him as a bird in the air, or a fish in the sea; he pants to be one with Christ, and so to be in him as a member is in the body. He desires to get into Christ as a fugitive shelters himself in his hiding place; he aspires to be so in Christ as never to come out of him; so that whenever any one looks for him he may find him in Jesus, and that when the Great Judge of all calls for him at the last great day he may find him in Christ. It would be ill to be found where Adam was, shivering under the trees of the garden with his fig-leaves on; but to be found beneath the tree of life, wearing the robe of God's righteousness, this will be bliss indeed. We are lost out of Christ, but we are found in him. Once met with by the Great Shepherd, we are found *by* him, but when safely folded in his love, we are found *in* him.

Do notice how Paul sticks to what he began with, namely, the unrobing himself of his boastings in the flesh and his arraying himself with Christ. He desires to be found in Christ, but he adds, "not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law." No, he will have nothing to do with that; he has already despised it as loss, and thrown it overboard as dross, and now he will not have it or call it his own at all. It is strange for a man to say "not having my own," but he does say so: he disowns his own righteousness as eagerly as other men disown their sins, and he highly esteems the righteousness which Christ has wrought out for us, which becomes ours by faith. He calls it "the righteousness which is of God by faith," and he sets great store by it; yea, it is all he desires. My brethren, this is the thing we ought to be seeking after, to be more and more conscious that we have Christ, to abide in him more continually, to be more like him, even in his sufferings and in his death, and to feel the full power of his resurrection-life within ourselves. May God grant us grace to do this, and the more we do it the more we shall coincide with the apostle in his slight esteem for all things else. This matter is like a balance, if one scale goes down, the other must go up. The weightier Christ's influence, the lighter will be the world and self-righteousness: and when Christ is all in all, then the world and self will be nothing at all.

II. I shall not weary you, I hope, by taking a few minutes for the last head, which is OUR OWN CALCULATIONS.

First, *do we join in Paul's earliest estimate?* At the outset of his spiritual life he saw all his own natural advantages and excellences, and he counted them loss for Christ. Every true Christian here remembers the time when he also counted all wherein he had formerly trusted to be of no value whatever, and betook himself to Jesus. But perhaps I speak to some who have never done so. You are at this time, my friend, still confident that you never did anybody any harm; that your life has been amiable and upright; that you have been just, charitable, and kind; and that all this certainly qualifies you for heaven. You count your natural virtues to be great gains. I spoke but three days ago to an old man, more than eighty, and when he told me of his great age I said, "I hope that when you die you will go to heaven." "Ah master," says he, "I never did anything why I should go any-

where else." There are multitudes who believe that creed, they do not speak it out quite so plainly as the aged peasant did, but they mean it all the same. Ah, dear friends, you must be brought out of that delusion, and all these moral excellences and virtues must be loss to you that Christ's righteousness may be your only gain. May the Holy Spirit teach you this distasteful truth. I wish your heart would sing—

"No more, my God, I boast no more
Of all the duties I have done;
I quit the hopes I held before,
To trust the merits of thy Son.

"Yes, and I must and will esteem
All things but loss for Jesus' sake:
O may my soul be found in him,
And of his righteousness partake."

You will never be saved till you lose all your legal hopes.

Now, secondly, after years of profession which many of you have made, *do you still continue in the same mind and make the same estimate?* I have known, I am sorry to say, some professors who have by degrees settled down upon something other than Christ. Beloved, are you resting now upon your years of manifest improvement since conversion? Are you beginning to depend upon the regularity of your attendance at the means of grace, upon your private prayer, upon what you have given, or upon your preaching, or anything else? Ah, it will not do. We must continue to stand where we stood at first, saying, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Come now, Christian, if you could go back, would you begin at the cross? If you could retrace your steps, would you begin again by resting upon Christ and by taking him to be your all in all? I will tell you my answer,—I have no other foundation upon which I could begin, I must rest on my Lord.

"To whom or whither should I go
If I should turn from thee?"

Lone refuge of my spirit, sole port of my poor labouring barque, to thee I fly to-day, if never I did so before; or if before, to thee I fly anew. Say you so, brothers and sisters? I am sure you do.

Now, again, you cannot join Paul in the third calculation and say, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things"; but still I must put it to you—*do you think you could have suffered the loss of all things* if it had been required of you for Christ's sake? If it had come to this, that you must be banished or renounce your Saviour, would you go into banishment? If the alternative were the spoiling of your goods, would you let all go rather than renounce your Lord? Your forefathers did so, and what the Spirit wrought in them I doubt not he would have wrought in you, had the times been of a severer character. But I will put you a more practical question. Since you have not had to suffer the loss of all things, do you hold all things at God's disposal? Are you ready to part with comfort and honour for him? Can you take up the social cross and join with the most despised sect for the truth's sake? Can you lose the respectability which attaches to popular creeds, and

can you cast in your lot with the despised Redeemer, when religion no more walks in her silver slippers, but travels barefooted through the mire? Can you be content to share with the "despised and rejected of men"? If you can, then you could also suffer the loss of all things; but see to it that it be indeed so.

Let me ask another practical question. You have not suffered the loss of all things, but seeing God has left your worldly comforts to you, *have you used all things for his sake?* Have you given to his cause all that cause might fairly ask? I hope you can say, "Yes, I hope I have, and, as the world judges, vastly more, for I have said in my soul—

‘ And if I must make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great
That I would give him all.’ ”

Well, then, you also may make your estimate as the apostle did: though you have not had practically to endure the loss of all things, yet you do count them but dung for Christ's sake.

But one thing more. Beloved, if Christ be so to you that all things else in comparison to him are dross and dung, *do you not want him for your children?* Do you not desire him for your friends? Do you not wish all your kinsfolk to have him? Whatever a man values for himself he values for others. You want your boy to follow your trade if you believe it to be a very good one. You desire to see your children well placed in life, but what position in life can be equal to being found in Christ? and what winnings under heaven can be compared with winning Christ. You may judge your own sincerity by the measure of your desire for the salvation of others, and I earnestly entreat you be not backward to tell to others the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord, and be not slow to impress upon them the absolute necessity of being found in him. Loathe the idea of having a righteousness of your own, but grasp with all your faith the righteousness of Jesus Christ. I commend to you Christians that you give your whole selves to Christ, that from this day forward ye serve him, spirit, soul and body, for after all there is nothing worth living for, nothing worth even giving a single tear for if you lose it, nor worth a smile if you gain it, save only that which comes from Christ, and can be used for Christ, and is found in Christ. Christ is all. May he be so to you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Philippians iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—136 (Song I.), 554, 661.

JUNE 19th being Mr. SPURGEON'S 43rd birthday, a fête will be held in the afternoon at the Stockwell Orphanage, with a public meeting in the evening. Goods forwarded at once for the sale-room will be much valued. If readers of the sermons will each send a donation for the orphans (240 boys) it will greatly cheer Mr. SPURGEON'S heart.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ALL THE PEOPLE AT WORK FOR JESUS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON WEDNESDAY MORNING, MAY 9TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT CHRIST CHURCH, WESTMINSTER BRIDGE ROAD,

On Behalf of the London Missionary Society.

I HAVE taken two texts from two successive chapters of the book of Joshua: the first is from Joshua the seventh, at the third verse. The spies who were sent to Ai returned to Joshua and said to him, "*Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai.*" This policy led to a disastrous defeat; and our other text gives us the Lord's command concerning the new attack. You will find it in the eighth of Joshua and the first verse: "*The Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land.*"

The two texts may be condensed into—first, *the advice of the spies*, to employ only a part of the people in the assault upon Ai,—"*Let not all the people go up*"; and, secondly, *the command of God*, to let every fighting man go forth to the war,—"*Take all the people of war with thee.*"

Brethren, like Israel, we are called to war, and we have a greater than Joshua at our head, in whose name we conquer. There is an inheritance which as yet has been held by the adversary, and in the name of God we have to drive him out. We are likely to experience difficulties very similar to those which were met with by the tribes; and I doubt not that their history (is it not written for our learning?) will prove exceedingly interesting to us, if we have a mind to consider it. We shall meet with the same defeats as they did if we fall into the same sins, and we shall win like victories if we are obedient to the commands which God has given us, which are very similar to those addressed to Israel of old. As in a glass we see ourselves in the twelve tribes, from the first day even until now, and in the texts before us there is a lesson for us, which may God, by his grace, enable us to learn. I pray the Holy Spirit to illuminate our minds while we read in the book of the

Wars of the Lord, and as soldiers of Christ learn from warriors of old time.

I. Let us consider THE ADVICE OF THE SPIES which led to such a shameful defeat.

And here we shall have to deal with *the error of supposing that a part only of the church will be sufficient to perform the work of the whole*;—that a large proportion may be idle, and that the rest will be quite enough to fight the Lord's battles. I feel it to be an error which, though not perhaps theoretically held by any of us, is practically to be seen abroad in our churches, and needs to be met and put to an end.

In Joshua's day *this error sprang up among the Israelites because, on account of their sins, God was displeased with them.* The commencement of the chapter tells us that the Lord God was wroth because the children of Israel had committed a trespass, in the accursed thing: for the sin of Achan the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people. That was the real reason of their defeat before Ai; but out of that secret cause grew the more manifest source of defeat—which was, that because God was displeased with them they were left to themselves, and hence they adopted a fatal policy. When God is in the midst of a church he guides its counsels, and directs the hearts of men to go about his work in the wisest manner. Is it not an old saying that "Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad"? And is not the heathen proverb the shadow of the fact that men become foolish when they have broken the commands of God, and thus they are chastened for one fault by being permitted to fall into another? Even upon the Lord's own people a measure of judicial blindness may come. You may depend upon it that when it becomes a doctrine that only special classes of men are to be expected to work in the church, there is some great wrong in the background. In that church which most of all has fallen into this fallacy, and has drawn the sharpest line between those called the clergy and the poor unfortunate laymen outside, who perchance may do *something* for God, but who cannot be expected, or indeed allowed to do anything in particular: in that church, I say, the deadliest errors have found a home. We, too, may take it for granted that when we begin to leave Christian work to be performed by a minister, or the visitation of the poor to be solely done by a paid missionary, we have some Achan in the camp, with a goodly Babylonish garment hidden in his tent. There must be an accursed thing somewhere or other which has caused us to be left to so gross a folly: either worldliness, or lukewarmness, or love of ease, or deep declension of heart must lie at the root of this slovenly and sluggish policy. It is not God's mind that it should be so; and he has evidently left us to ourselves when this fatal method is adopted. When the Holy Ghost rests upon the church this folly is practically avoided, nay, it is not even thought of. God grant to the churches represented here to-day that they may walk in such soundness of doctrine and have such spirituality of life that they may be full of the divine presence, and never dream for a moment of sending a portion only of their members out to war, and leave the rest to sit still! We cannot leave the battles of our Lord to be fought by mercenary troops; the whole army of men made willing in the day of the Lord's power must go out under the command of our divine Joshua to meet the foe.

Furthermore, *this evil policy arose out of presumption engendered by success.* But a little while ago all Israel had marched around Jericho for seven days, and on the seventh day, when they shouted, the city walls fell flat to the ground. Perhaps they began to say, "Did those massive walls fall when we compassed them about? O Israel, thou art a great nation! And did they fall with nothing but a shout? Then the Hittite and the Hivite, and every other enemy, shall flee before us like chaff before the wind! What need can there be to carry all our baggage up the hill to Ai? What need to march so many men? Two or three thousand will be quite sufficient to carry that small city by storm. We can do wonders, and therefore we need not put forth all our strength!"

Brethren, many dangers surround success; it is not much of it that any of us can bear. The full sail needs much ballast lest the boat be upset. When in this or any other part of the world the church sees many converts as the fruit of her labours, when there are great gatherings, and a good deal of shouting, great interest excited, and multitudinous conversions, it is very natural to calculate that the work has been easily done, and needs no very severe or general effort. The idea is fostered that there is no need now for continued house-to-house visitation, no need for more missionaries, no need for regular plodding service in school and cottage-meeting, no need to set our young men and women to work for Christ! The drill and organization of the regular army is in danger of being lightly esteemed. Blow the trumpet, and the walls will come down easily enough. Jericho has fallen with shouting and marching, let us gather ourselves together and show that we are a mighty people, who no longer need to go up unanimously and laboriously in rank and order to the fight, as our fathers did.

Ah, brethren, this evil spirit must be exorcised, for it cometh from the devil. God will not bless us if we tolerate this spirit. Why, some of us are too great altogether for our Lord Jesus to use in his work. Like Saul's armour, we are unfit for our David to put on if Goliath is to be slain. We must be more sensible of weakness, more mindful that the conversion of souls is the work of omnipotence, or we shall see but little done. We must ourselves believe more fully in the need of earnest work for God, and put forth all our strength, and strain every sinew for him, knowing that it is his power that worketh in us mightily when we strive with all our hearts. We must learn that our great Leader means us not only to shout and blow rams' horns, but to employ all the strength of every man in our ranks in his glorious cause. May we be delivered from the presumption which leads to the foolish course which Israel pursued.

Let us not forget that these children of Israel were *forgetting their commission and violating the command of God.* It is a terrible truth that the tribes had been brought out of Egypt that they might be the executioners of divine vengeance upon races which had committed capital crimes, for which the Lord had condemned them to be rooted out. The reward of the ministers of justice was to be the land which the infamous ones had polluted. They were charged to make no alliances with them, nor to intermarry with them, but to execute them for their crimes; and the commission was not given to some of the

Israelites, but to all of them, for all were to be rewarded by a portion of the land. The charge was not given to Joshua and to the elders only, but to all the tribes. As they all expected to have a dwelling-place in Canaan, so they were all expected to conquer the territory by their own exertions. They were *all* an enlisted host for God, and he never ordained that a *part* only should go forth in his great controversy with the condemned Canaanites.

If we ever neglect to render universal service as a church in the cause of Christ we shall depart from our trust and call, for the Lord has sent all his disciples to testify of him and contend against sin. He has sent us all to make known everywhere, according to our ability, the glad tidings of his salvation; and he has not given this command to this or that man, or to this or that body of men, but to all his chosen. Every member of the body has its own office, and no part of it can be allowed to lie dormant. To none has he said, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and find fault with those who do the work;" but to all his saints our Lord Jesus says—"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Every Christian man is described in Scripture as being a light, a light not to be hidden, but seen of men. Every child of God is described as forming a part of that "city set on a hill which cannot be hid." It is not only the ministers who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world; but "*ye* are the salt of the earth"; "*ye* are the light of the world"; all of you without exception. Each one in his own proportion and in his own place must be used as a vessel in the great house of the Lord: and we shall get away from our true position and our high calling if we excuse ourselves or our brethren from personal service, and then go and take part in public meetings and thank God for what other people have done on our behalf.

These Israelites, in the new fashion which they were trying to set up, were *departing from their own model*. That model was, doubtless, the siege of Jericho. In that siege there was much dependence upon God, but there was no neglect of instrumentality; and, though all they did was to go round the city and shout, yet in so doing they were literally fulfilling orders, and doing all that was commanded. Yes, if this would bring down the walls they did it thoroughly—they marched as bidden and shouted as desired. They *all* went round Jericho; they did not some of them sit in their tents and look on while the others paraded, but they all filed out in order. It might seem to be a perfectly needless procession, but it was commanded by God, and they all united in it. In martial array they all compassed the city, and *all* gave the shout, and down came the walls, and there and then every man went up to the prey, leaping over the ruined walls to strike his foe in the name of the Lord! That was their precedent and pattern, and they were departing from it very sadly when they said, "Let not all the people labour thither."

What, then, is our model as a church? Is it not Pentecost? Is it not those earliest days, that dawn of Christianity, that golden era to which we always look back as the heroic age of our holy faith? In that day did they not break bread from house to house, all of them? Did they not sell their lands and lay the price of them at the apostles'

feet? Was there not a burning enthusiasm throughout the entire company of disciples? We know it was so; and if we are to see again the triumphs of those primitive times we must go back to primitive practice, and every man and woman and child in the church must be consecrated to the divine service. "Child," did I say? Yes, verily, for "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." I suppose there is not one person present who heard that famous sermon by Matthew Wilks upon the universal service rendered by idolaters to their false gods, from the text, "The children gathered wood, and the fathers kindled the fire, and the women kneaded their dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven." The preacher's argument on that occasion was that which I would now press upon you, that all should take part in the work of the Lord. Distinct offices but united aims; diverse operations but the same spirit; many and yet one—so let it be. Would to God that the church would recognise this more fully, and so come back to the great precedents of her warfare.

Again, this error which we are carefully to avoid was no doubt *the dictate of carnal wisdom*. Spies were never of much use to Israel—two only of the first twelve were faithful—what did Israel want with spies? Better far had it been to walk by faith. To Ai they must need send spies instead of going up at once in the confidence of faith: evil came of it, for these spies counselled that only part of the people need labour up the hill. And, brethren, the best ministers of Christ, worthy of all honour, would be the cause of great mischief if once their carnal wisdom should make them think that they can supersede primitive plans with wiser inventions. I dare say the men-at-arms would have said that Israel's numbers were a hindrance to efficient fighting, and that the common sort were in the way of trained warriors and encumbered the battle. I know that some able brethren are of this mind. Have they not said in acts if not in words, "That young man is preaching—we wish he would be quiet; he makes such blunders in the Queen's English! He has a great deal of zeal, but there is no little danger in it. And those good sisters—we know they do a good deal of work which was never done before, but—": and they shake their heads at them. That is often the main contribution of the more prudent sort to the service of God! They generously lavish upon the younger folks their grave looks and their shakes of the head at innovation and zeal. There is the Sunday-school; well, that is a proper thing, because it is a recognised agency, but if it were started to-day for the first time many would shake their heads at that also. City mission work, again, is a tried and proved mode of operation; but in days gone by there was thought to be peril in lay agency, especially as the men were not college trained. Well, my brethren, there are many more holy agencies yet to be invented, and though they will none of them be perfect, our wet blankets will not improve them. Better far will it be to help the good, and as for the *little* mischief which may come of imperfect agencies, let the wise men supply the antidote and rectify the blunders. Anything is better than lethargy and death. Thank God that our people have a mind to do good, and if their zeal be inclined to wildfire, let us not quench it, but try to use it for holy purposes; for, after all, fire, wild or otherwise, is what we want. If we have the fire from

heaven in the form of zeal for God's glory, it can easily be regulated, but the most terrible calamity is to have no fire at all.

"But," says one, "may not the ignorant and indiscreet advocacy of truth by unqualified persons do a great deal of harm to the cause we love?" It may; but is the truth you believe so weak as to be in any serious danger from such an accident? Is not truth invincible and fully able to take care of herself? All she has to fear is the cramping and imprisoning agency of excessive prudence. With weakness for her guardian, and folly for her defender, she is yet safe! The God who protects her from her foes can assuredly save her from her friends. The danger lies in our carnal wisdom, which would cover the light with a bushel to prevent its being blown out, and wrap the talent in a napkin because it is only one.

We very frequently hear it said that there is no need for so much excitement and exertion: and this, too, has come from our prudent men:—we ought to take it coolly, the thing went rightly enough in our grandfather's days, the great men of the past did very well without all this stir! Well, we have observed that wet blankets are still on sale, and may be had at wholesale prices! Now, brethren, I do not know what you think about it, but I for one feel that there is much work to be done, and very little time to do it in. If I plunge into the work with all my might, I shall do none too much; but, at any rate, all my little might is demanded by such a cause. There is a blessed leisure of the heart which sits at Jesus's feet; but I am sure that it is not inconsistent with that violence which the kingdom of heaven suffers—"and the violent take it by force." There were people who complained, in the days of Wesley and Whitefield, because their zeal caused a great deal of fanaticism; but, thank God, the blessed fanaticism spread throughout the land; and it is not extinct even now, nor shall it be by God's grace, but it shall go on increasing till Christ shall come! Let us bring up our men, the whole of the tribes, weak though they be, and though their weapons be no better than the axes and coulters with which Israel fought the Philistines! Let us spring upon our foe as one man, even as in the days of old. Let us all go up to Ai; and as surely as God was with his people then, so surely will he be with our compacted hosts to-day, and the world shall learn again that there is a God in Israel!

Only once more upon this point: these children of Israel, in sending to the war only part of the men, were *breaking in upon the divine design*. The Lord never intended to have two peoples, but one; and so we read that the Reubenites and the Gadites came over Jordan to the war, although their portion was already conquered. It was the divine intent that they should be one army of the living God, each separate son of the seed of Abraham belonging to that army and fighting in it; he meant, that not some only, but all should see the mighty works of his hand, working with them to overthrow their adversaries. When Jericho fell, all saw it; and if Ai should fall before the divine power, they must all be there to see with their own eyes the glory of the Lord. I am sure it is so with the church of God to-day. Our Lord means to keep all his chosen ones as one army, and to instruct them all as one band. And when are we most manifestly one? When we get to work. If you

come to declamation upon your own peculiar points, I shall wish you good morning ; but if you are going to work for Jesus, suffer me to go with you. I have marked the history of organizations formed for no practical purpose, and they have invariably come to an end, and I do not know that we need weep over the fact ; but work to be done for Jesus is a mighty bond of union. Our God does not mean that his ministers should alone see all the death-beds, and be the sole spectators of the dying triumphs of his people. No, our brothers and sisters must visit too, and have their faith strengthened and their prospects brightened. He does not wish that preachers alone should see all the converts and encourage all the desponding ones. No, his wisdom perceives that it is good for all his servants to behold the trophies of his grace, and know how to use the encouragements of his promises. The Lord does not ordain that one or two should mourn over the evil of the hearts of men and do battle with sinners alone. No ; he means all his servants in their measure to learn the lessons which holy warfare would teach them. Not to deal practically with souls is perilous to ourselves. Men who spend their time providing us with marvellous essays and papers in the reviews are most of them unsound in the faith ; but if they went out into the world of real life, to save men, if they had to battle personally with hard hearts and evil passions in actual conversion work, they would find that their fine-spun theories are of no use ; they would learn that the Puritan faith of our forefathers is the sturdiest of all weapons and the best adapted for the world as it is, and that the old truth is the sword with which alone you can pierce the hearts of men. Work for Jesus is an education for a Christian. What an education it would be for the philanthropist to see what the agricultural labourer eats, or rather does not eat ! What a lesson for the sanitary reformer to see with his own eyes where the people lodge ! What an education for a man of wealth to spend a night or two in the crowded chambers where our London workmen dwell ! And in the same way, holy service is a training for us. In order really to know man's fall and the way of redemption we must go among the people and labour for their conversion. Hence our Lord will not excuse any of us from service in this war, because it would be to our great damage to be away from it ; and it is for our encouragement and growth that we should take our share in it.

I will finish this part of my subject with a parable. In the days of chivalry a certain band of knights had never known defeat. In all battles their name was terrible to the foe. On their banners was emblazoned a long list of victories ; but in an evil hour the leader of the knights summoned them in chapter, and he said : " My brethren, we cause ourselves too much toil. We have a band of skilled warriors versed in all the arts of battle, these are quite sufficient for ordinary conflicts, and it will be wise for the many if they tarry in the camp and rest, or furnish their weapons for extraordinary occasions. Let the champions go alone. Yonder knight with his sword can cleave a man in twain at a single stroke, and his comrade can break a bar of iron with his axe ; others among us are equally powerful, each one being a host in himself. With the terror of our name behind them, the chosen champions can carry on the war while the rest divide the spoil." The

saying pleased the warriors well, but from that hour the knell of their fame was rung, and defeat defiled their standard. When they came together they complained of the champions because they had not sustained the honour of the order, and they bade them exert themselves more heroically. They did so, but with small success. Louder and louder were the notes of discontent and the demands for new champions. Then one of the oldest of the knights said: "Brethren, why do you blame us? The mistake lies here. In the old time, when the enemy assailed us, a thousand men were up in arms, and we who led the van knew that a gallant army followed at our heels. But now you have made us solitary champions, and the adversary takes heart to defy us, finding us unsustained. Come you all with us to the fray as aforetime, and none shall stand against us." Brethren, ye need not that a man interpret this unto you.

II. In the second place, my text contains THE COMMAND THAT ALL ISRAEL SHOULD GO FORTH TO THE FIGHT. "Take all the men of war with thee."

I will mainly address myself to my brethren in Christ; and what I have to say to them I say humbly, speaking mainly to myself. Brethren, we must have all our church members go to the war. I know this is our theory; but in practice we do not accomplish it. The baggage of our army is too heavy; the sutlers and camp-followers are too many. We want to turn out the drones, and we need an increase of true working bees. How is it to be done? *We must be ourselves deeply impressed with the evil brought upon idle Christians by their idleness, and the evil which they bring upon the rest of the church.* Only suppose a Christian—I will treat it as a mere supposition—living an idle life; give him nothing to do and he will become morbid with introspection; or he will grow quarrelsome, contending with all who hold opinions contrary to his own; or he will dishonour the name of Christ by sin. You know when it was that David fell with regard to Bathsheba; it was at the time when kings go forth to battle and he tarried still at Jerusalem. He had not fallen into that sin if he had not played the sluggard at home. Where was his duty as commander-in-chief? Was it not in the camp? Indolence is temptation. Certain of our churches are suffering from unsound teaching, but they are suffering as much from want of work. The moss is growing upon them, the rust is eating them up; the gold becomes dim, the silver is losing its brightness, and all for want of use. Oh, brethren, if we stand at the foot of a barren tree in the vineyard of Christ we know what must happen. As we look upon it and see no fruit our emotions ought to be those of bitterest sorrow; for the axe is prepared for those that bear no fruit. Alas, that we should have church members, not inconsistent in moral character, but excellent in many ways, and yet cumberers of the ground! There is a great deal of charity about of an evil sort, because it does not face the truth in honest desire for men's good. Let us be too truly charitable to indulge in such fatal charity. Let us sigh and cry when we think of our useless church members as branches of the vine that bear no fruit, of whom the Master has said that they shall be taken away—"For every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away"; and "men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." What sorrow will fill our

hearts if we reflect upon this! If we regard fruitless professors in this light, it will go further than anything else to make us successful in exciting all our brethren to active service.

We need to be impressed with the mischief which idlers cause to others. One sickly sheep infects the flock; one member who does nothing lowers the tone of the whole body. The indolence of prominent professors is not merely the waste of their own labour, but of that of scores of others. Leading persons are looked upon as a sort of model for the rest; and if So-and-so is content merely to fill his place in the pew and subscribe so much (or, rather, *so little*) per annum, then others will say, "We shall be up to the standard if we do the same." Every man in an army who is not efficient and really serviceable is on the enemy's side. What can the enemy more desire than that the opposite army may be encumbered with the sick? What can be better news for them than to hear that the hospitals are crowded, for then they know that a large number of men are occupied with the sick and detained from the fight. The enemy claps his hands and cries, "These sick men are worth many a gun to us." Oh, useless professor, you cannot serve the devil better than by joining a church and doing nothing.

I want my brethren to feel all this most keenly. I doubt not they do feel it, but I want to feel it more vividly myself; for when we get into a truly sensitive condition—when we who are ministers are alive upon this point—we shall stir up the people of God, *all of them*, and we shall see greater things than these.

Moreover, brethren, *we must hunt out the sin which leads to the evil against which we contend*, and I believe it is want of vital godliness in many cases. I do not know how my friend Mr. Newman Hall finds it—I suppose he does not suffer much from it; but I know pastors who say they have very respectable members, but nothing can be done with them. In some cases prayer-meetings are given up because the rich members come home from the City and dine at the hour which is usually selected for the prayer-meeting, and so they cannot attend. Dining is a most important business: it would seem to be more important than praying. Business men are so fatigued. It is true that we find carpenters and bricklayers and other workmen delighting in our prayer-meetings. Is this because they do not work so hard as your City men? In some quarters it is found impossible to carry on church work effectively because the very persons who should be workers and officers are resolved that their liberal subscriptions and Sabbath worship shall be the whole of their assistance to the cause of Christ. As to laying themselves out for holy work, they look in your face with wonder, as if they thought you had lost your senses when you propose any very arduous service to them. Now, this shirking of prayer and service is to be exposed and denounced in all faithfulness. It is often the sin which grows out of too much ease, self-indulgence, and luxurious living. It seems as if the more God gives a man the less return he is inclined to offer.

Whatever the secret sin of the church may be, let us try to discover it, and then by the aid of the Holy Spirit endeavour to educate all our members to work for the Lord. *There must be a continual insisting upon the personal obligations of Christians.* We who are known as Baptists

are of opinion that baptism, as the personal act of a believer, is a good lesson to our people as to their personal responsibilities; but I will not for a moment suppose that my Pædobaptist brethren are less earnest in enforcing the same truth. You also believe firmly in the personality of true religion, you teach the need of personal faith and consecration. Then we are agreed upon the great benefit of urging upon each man the duty of personal work for Christ. "What art thou doing for Christ?" is a question to be asked of all. We must make every believer feel that he is not his own, but bought with a price; that no amount of giving can compensate for personal labour for his Lord; that even he who by sickness and infirmity cannot actually work should render his contribution to the general effort by continual prayer. No one must appear before the Lord empty, but either by active or passive service must prove his gratitude to God.

And then, while each is responsible, neglect by one is injurious to the common service of the whole. I saw a cart standing this morning on the roadside with one wheel chained; there was no fear of its moving with that one wheel fast. Sometimes one chained wheel in a church will hinder all. We are all parts of a great machine, and the stopping of one part does not simply mean the one stoppage, but the hindering of the whole organization. If a piece of bone in the body becomes dead, it is not simply useless, but it becomes the nidus of mischief, and the cause of pain. It begins to decay, disease forms, and serious evil comes of it to the entire frame. A dead professor who is content to enjoy the doctrines without fulfilling the precepts of the gospel becomes a source of serious danger in the church of Jesus Christ, and we know it to be indeed so.

My brethren, *dwell upon the importance of the enterprise in which we are engaged*; and so act as to make others feel its importance. Why take all that trouble about furbishing up a doubtful point of divinity, which is of no earthly use when it is furbished up? Why all that Sunday morning spent in discussing far-fetched points of belief? What is this but sheer trifling? Some are greatly given to what they call "thinking"—"dreaming" is the truer word. Better by half plunge the old gospel sword at once into men's hearts and slay their sins in the name of the Lord than stand quibbling about certain characters upon the hilt of the weapon. One sermon about nothing will do more harm than all your speculations will do good. Men come to forget that the gospel is meant to save souls, and look upon it as a mass of interesting subjects. Certain sermons are said to be "intellectual treats,"—I think that is what I have heard them called. Our religion does not mean that, it means fighting with sin; it is, if anything at all, one of real downright practical work for Jesus Christ; and we must show that it is so. Our teaching nothing in elaborate language will make our people think that practical godliness is a small matter, and that intellect is better than piety. We must make men feel that to save a soul is better than to possess all knowledge, or even to gain the whole world! While others are making a new gospel let us labour to save souls by the old one. May God enable us to preach in awful earnest, and by this means, the Holy Spirit quickening us, we shall get all our people to march up to the battle of their God!

bove all, *let us pray for more grace*. We must never read the y of old times, and say, "What a splendid denomination ours has y, can we not rest on our laurels?" Impossible. You must win ones. Napoleon used to say, "Conquest has made me what I am, conquest must maintain me"; and it is so with Christians. You t advance; you must outdo the exploits of the past, and eclipse deeds of your sires, or you will show yourselves unworthy of them. battle thickens, and how shall we meet the growing demands upon xcept by seeking for sevenfold grace? Our spiritual stamina needs e increased. If we were to collect a number of men all wheezing conghing, and only fit for the Consumption Hospital, and set them work upon a railway, we might commend them for their diligence, they would never accomplish much. On the other hand, gather ether a company of burly, brawny men, and they will say, "Who thou, O strong mountain?" and, before it can answer, it will be ed to a plain! See how they use the pick and the shovel! Vital ngth is their motive force. O God, strengthen us! We are willing, e of us, but our strokes are feeble! Grant us, we beseech thee, e of thy Holy Spirit, and we shall accomplish great things. Strength ghts in work, feebleness is afraid of it. Spiritual strength will pro- e universal spiritual service for the Lord Jesus Christ.

have done when I have looked into the future for a moment. If it old ever come to pass that the minister and all his people went forth he war for King Jesus, what would happen? I seem to be in para- when I think of it! If all, without exception, who name the name Jesus, went earnestly into his vineyard, what life there would be, and t unity in all the churches! There would be no longer a name to , but real living! There would be no divisions if all were alike ous for the glory of the common Master. You would not hear of rch meetings which are scenes of disturbance, and churches where tors are unhappy; such things would be regarded as extinct animals he ages gone by.

Then we should hear no complaints of our not being strong enough to the work of our great cities and scattered hamlets. The very olest church, if every one did his share, would be strong enough for position. Moreover, there would be no lack of funds for any holy erprise. Ah, if God's treasure received from all as it receives from e, we should almost have to tell the people to stay their hands, be- se we should scarcely know how to use all their gifts. But the lth which belongs to Christ and the service kept back from him ker in men's coffers, and the amount of which the Lord is robbed is ost beyond computation. The missionary societies, very well sus- ed on the whole, do not receive more than a tenth or a hundredth t of what God's people ought to give to so divine a work. If the rchant prince who contributes what is thought to be a handsome a to Christ, only gave in the same proportion as many a pious girl o has to earn her living at so many stitches for a penny, and if all e as the few are giving, we should soon supply all nations with sionaries.

And if this were the case, what enterprises would be undertaken? at overflowings of Christian zeal should we perceive? We should

be sending out messengers to discover every region which remained unsubdued, and we should at once be up and doing. Then the mission field would be strong with men of noblest fitness. I do not know how you think about it, but it does seem strange to me that we here in this little island are so close packed together, and yet a few scores or hundreds only go into the mission field. "Some of us have large spheres here, and we cannot be expected to go, can we?" I answer, the ablest preacher that ever lived is not too good for missionary work; the most useful man at home is probably the fittest for the foreign field. Let us each question his own heart as to the claims of the heathen: for my own part, I dare not sleep till I have honestly considered whether I ought to go or not. We tell our young men in the College that they must prove that they have *not* to go, or else their duty is clear. If some of the men of Israel had said to Joshua, "We cannot go to Ai," Joshua would have replied, "You must prove that you cannot go or you may not be excused." All other things being equal, ministers should take it for granted that it is their duty to invade new territory unless they can prove to the contrary. When I think of the number of young men who are well educated, and can read a capital paper at the Mechanics' Institution, and profess to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, it grieves me to see their talents dedicated so largely to meaner ends. Oh, bleeding Lamb, it does seem strange that we have a greater passion for literature than for thee! more care for fleeting than for enduring things!

France is wanting the gospel. See what one beloved brother in Paris has been able to do,—are there none who can do the like for other cities in that neighbour country? Here and there a good man can say, "I have made a competency"—why not live and employ it where you can lay it out personally for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom? Such a thing is being done by a few, it is not therefore impossible, and you who follow the grand example shall have your reward. See what Pastor Harms did in the village of Hermansburg, how he stirred up all the people until they gave themselves and their property to the Lord, and built a ship for the mission and went forth in it to Africa, company after company, to evangelize. Should it not be the ambition of a minister to feel that if he stays at home he will at least, by the Holy Spirit's help, produce missionaries by scores in the village where he labours. I wot the day cometh that he will be thought most happy who suffered and laboured most for Christ. When this great fight is over he who is most scarred will be most honoured, and he who dwelt at home at ease will think himself but sparsely blest because he put not in for his share of the war. Let us be all at work for Christ and his redeemed church! All at work, at all times, and in all ways for Christ! It is for that I plead; and then we will take another motto and say—the world for Christ, and Christ for every nation under heaven! This will be accomplished when the Spirit has aroused us all. O blessed Spirit, convert the church and it will convert the world!

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HAPPINESS: THE PRIVILEGE AND DUTY OF
CHRISTIANS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 10TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."—Deuteronomy xxxiii. 29.

THESE are the last recorded words of Moses, and they are significant, for they show us that he found comfort in his dying moments in considering the happiness of the people for whom he had laboured all his life. From the day when, by God's power, he led them up out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness they had never ceased to lie near his heart. They had been a very heavy burden to him at times, but with marvellous meekness and patience he had borne with their many rebellious provocations, and only once spoken bitterly of them. Oftentimes had he stood in the gap and made intercession for them, when otherwise they would have been destroyed. He had for their sakes given up the most glorious prospect that was ever proposed to the mind of man, for the Lord had said to him in secret, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them; and I will make of thee a greater nation." But no, even such a proposal could not divert him from his patriotic zeal for his people: he loved Israel, erring Israel, ungrateful Israel, as a mother loves her child, and family aggrandizement was relinquished for love of the nation. Still he continued to instruct, and lead, and guide the stiffnecked race, having no thought but God's glory in the midst of Israel, and no ambition but to see the tribes brought at length into the promised land. When about to die the ruling passion is strong upon him, and from it he draws his consolation. He seems to say to himself, "I can no more go out and come in: also the Lord hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan, but though I must leave the beloved nation, yet they are a happy people, and are safe in Jehovah's hands." He looks with sparkling eye at the privileges with which God

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had enriched them, and he feels that he may quietly go up to the mountain and fall asleep, for they would be blessed when he was gone, and saved of the Lord.

Ah, my dear young friends, you who are children of godly families, you cannot tell what joy you will give to your parents if you are converted to God; for when they come to die they will find it one of their sweetest consolations to see their children walking in the truth. They have loved you dearly, and they will feel a pang in leaving you; but if they can feel that God has blessed you, and saved you, they will die in peace. I have heard saints when dying say, "There is but one thing that I want, and for which I could wish to be spared a little longer. I could wish to live to see all my family believing in the Lord. O that all my offspring were lovers of Jesus." I have heard dying saints express themselves in language somewhat similar to that of David: "The Lord hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure, although my house be not so with God as I could desire." That "although my house be not so with God" has been a thorn in their pillow, and they have felt it painful to quit their household while yet their children were so unhappy as to be out of Christ and unreconciled to God. Think of this, dear young people, I pray you, and perhaps natural affection may be blessed in the hand of God to lead you to seek after eternal salvation.

Thus you see how Moses consoled himself; but why was not this expression of the great lawgiver left as a soliloquy unrecorded? Moses had cheered himself with this reflection, "Happy art thou, O Israel," what need to write it down, or to utter it before the people? It is frequently an unwise thing to tell a man of his propitious surroundings, for he may become vain of them. You may commend a man's estate until he foolishly dreams that you are commending *him*. When you praise a man's position, it is the next thing to flattering the man himself, for the most of men do not divide between themselves and their condition, but read a commendation of their condition as a commendation of themselves, though it be not so. Hence one has sometimes to be very chary of calling men happy; and all the more so because we cannot generally be sure that they are happy; external circumstances being but a poor means of judgment. The fairest apple may be rotten at the core, the finest linen may be a coverlet for a corpse. Moreover, according to the truthful rule of the ancients, no man is to be counted happy till he is dead, seeing that you do not know the whole of his life, and it may happen that the circumstances which now appear to be the foundation of a happy life may turn out to be a preparation for increased bitterness in the after part of existence. Yet Moses speaks thus openly to Israel without a word of qualification or caution: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee!" Now, we are quite certain that Moses did not err in this; it would be great self-conceit to imagine such a thing. We may confide in the clearness of his judgment, in the maturity of his experience, and in the fidelity of his spirit. We are sure that he did not speak with rashness, for he was of a meek and gentle disposition, and somewhat slow in speech, and not likely, therefore, to warm into unreasonable enthusiasm and go beyond the sober truth. Above all, the Holy Ghost has adopted the lawgiver's words,

for he had himself inspired them, and we have them here in the infallible Word of God, so that it is quite certain that Israel was happy, even as our text declares. The people were favoured, and it was right for them to be told so, a wise design led to their being reminded of the blessed fact. I think that Moses thus eulogized the nation by way of consoling them for his departure. He did as much as say, "I climb the mount to go away to God, but happy art thou, O Israel: whether Moses be with thee or not, God is with thee." No doubt many would say as the great lawgiver departed, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof"; but Moses reminds them that the shield of their help and the sword of their excellency would still be with them, and they would still be a people saved of the Lord. What better comfort can be offered to bereaved hearts?

I think also that he had in his mind's eye the fact that they were now about to face new difficulties. Under Joshua they were to cross the Jordan and fight the Canaanites. They had known occasional brushes in the wilderness with Amalek and Bashan, but for the most part they had led peaceable lives; now, however, each man was to be a soldier. From the day in which his foot pressed the promised land each man was to contend for the mastery, and therefore Moses sustains them with rich and nourishing meat to strengthen them for the new service. "Happy art thou, O Israel; thou art about to throw thyself into the midst of ferocious tribes, who will all conspire to cut thee off; but thou art a people saved of the Lord; thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

"My never-ceasing songs shall show
The mercies of the Lord,
And make succeeding ages know
How faithful is his word.

"The sacred truths his lips pronounce
Shall firm as heaven endure;
And if he speak a promise once,
The eternal grace is sure.

"How long the grace of David held
The promised Jewish throne!
But there's a nobler covenant seal'd
To David's greater Son.

"His seed for ever shall possess
A throne above the skies;
The meanest subject of his grace
Shall to that glory rise."

So then I gather from the example of Moses that to commend a man's condition, if you have a wise motive for it, and can either console him under trouble or inspire him for future service, is a right thing to do. This morning we are going to repeat the experiment. Whatever was said about the happy condition of the natural Israel is emphatically true of the spiritual Israel. The tribes were our types, and what was true of them is true of us. Without any sort of wresting of the text, we shall this morning apply to all believers, to all who rest in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh, the words of Moses to the

tribes, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord." We are the true Israel, the spiritual seed of the father of the faithful, and to us unbounded happiness belongs.

This shall be our point this morning. First, *let us consider the happy condition of God's people*; and then, secondly, *let us consider the result of our fully realizing this happiness*. May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, fill us with all joy and peace while we commune upon this subject. May the blessed God now bless all his children.

I. Let us dwell upon THE HAPPY CONDITION OF GOD'S PEOPLE. The Israelites were so favoured that Moses himself was astonished at the eminently desirable condition in which they were placed. We may readily imagine that we see him lifting up his hands with surprise, and saying, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee!" He considered the nation to be incomparably favoured, and therefore enquired in astonishment, "Who is like unto thee?" He had seen Egypt with all its wisdom and its wealth, and the desert tribes in all their rustic simplicity, and doubtless he knew the condition of most of the nations under heaven, but having his eye upon them all he nevertheless looks upon the chosen race which God had brought up out of Egypt, and he says, "Who is like unto thee?" Beloved, you who are in Christ are favoured by God beyond all others. None in the whole universe are so happily placed as you are: "ye are a chosen generation, a peculiar people." If you have been born again and saved, you are the pick and choice of all God's creatures, and he has indulged you with a measure of love and kindness such as he has shown to none else. I address believers as a body, and I ask you, would you change your estate with the rich of this world? Would you barter grace for gain? Surely not. There is much that is comfortable connected with the possession of wealth; but if you look at the opulent, as such, there is no reason to believe that they are the possessors of any great amount of happiness. Gold cannot lighten the heavy heart or cool the burning brow: far oftener it cankers the soul, and lies like a weight upon the spirit. It is a heavy metal and has weighed many down to hell. You, even though you be the poor of the flock, the despised and rejected of men, are a people infinitely favoured beyond those who possess the treasures of this fleeting world. Select even a company of princes, and let them stand before you in all their pomp, half worshipped by their subjects; but they will not excite your envy, for "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," and those who climb to the high places of the earth commonly confess that there is little peace of mind to be found there. You who believe in Jesus are kings of a nobler sort already, and enjoy honours and blessings which emperors might covet: you reign in Christ after a far higher manner than princes and emperors, for you rule in a superior realm, since the spiritual far exceeds the material. Who is like unto thee, O believer, amongst the mighty ones of the earth? for the Lord Jehovah is thy strength and thy song, thy portion and thy praise, thy comfort and thy crown. Turn you, if you will, to those who are famous for knowledge, men of skill, and wit, and research, yet among these there are none to be found comparable in happiness to Christians. To know yourself forgiven, to know yourself eternally saved, to know yourself ordained unto eternal life, to be

assured that you will enjoy bliss unspeakable when yonder sun turns to a coal, and the moon is black as sackcloth of hair : to know all this is to be unspeakably favoured ; the utmost learning cannot compare with it. Nor if you take the sons of pleasure, with their wine and their music, and their sensual joys, can you find any rivals for our happiness. Solomon tells us concerning laughter that it is mad, and sums up all earthly joy with—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Our consecrated pleasures are not such ; our holy joy has no delusion in it ; it is solid and real, and can never be taken from us, and therefore those who possess it are a people unparalleled for blessedness. Wealth, rank, learning, fame, pleasure, and all else that man holds dear, we would gladly renounce for the joy of our Lord. He has satisfied us with favour, and filled us to the brim with content, now that he has given us himself for our portion. Blessed are our very dwellings, and the beds we lie upon, and the tables at which we sit. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!"

Am I speaking to some believers who are not enjoying this happiness? Is it not strange that men should be in a position which angels might envy, and yet they fail to realize their blest estate? Just as some men with thousands a year will live like paupers, so are there others who, with a boundless income of eternal love at their disposal, nevertheless starve their souls with small delights. Just think for a minute, O downcast believers, of this singular fact, and chide yourselves into a more joyful frame of mind. There was a time when you would have given your eyes to be what you now are. Do you remember when sin lay heavy on your conscience, and a dread of death and hell brooded over you? What would you have given then to have been able to say, "By grace I am forgiven"? You know you used to envy the very least and poorest and most afflicted of God's saints in those days, and you were wont to think that if you could lie in a dungeon and be fed on bread and water all your life, yet if you could but once get rid of the burden of sin you would never murmur again. Yet here you are, accepted in the Beloved, and conscious of being adopted into the family of heaven, and for all that your joy is at a low ebb. Should it be so?

Remember also the time of your espousals, the season of your first love. Why, in those days you wondered how a Christian could be unhappy. As for yourself, you were so full of intense delight that when you heard some older Christian lamenting over anxiety, doubt, fear, and the like, you looked at him as a prodigy, you could not comprehend his speaking after that fashion. You felt that to say, "My Beloved is mine and I am his," was the very essence of heaven to you, and you could not make out how a man could be an heir of glory and not be as overflowing with delight as you were. Therefore, I say, chide yourself to think that you should have fallen from your eminency and come away from those sweet delights.

Beloved, if we are not as happy as the days are long in these summer months, it is entirely our own fault, for there is plenty of reason for being so. Come, Christians, why are you cast down? Why are you so disquieted? Have you not forgotten your redemption, forgotten your adoption, forgotten your justification, and forgotten your safety in Christ? Have you not also somewhat neglected to survey your hopes? What if

you have little of this world : see what is laid up in store for you hereafter. Within a few years at the outside you are to be with the angels, where no dust of toil shall ever stain your garments again, where no sweat of labour shall stand upon your brow, where no care shall scourge the heart, and no sorrow dim the eye. Grief, loss, bereavement, or want shall never approach you there. You are of the blood imperial, and you are soon to be acknowledged as a peer of heaven's own realm; the day of your accession to sacred honours hastens on. It may be but a week or two that the bliss will tarry; even a few hours may be the only interval, and we shall stand beatified amongst the perfected ones who see God's face without a veil between. We have every reason to be happy, and if we are not so, it must be because we fail to remember the privileges which our Lord has bestowed upon us. Let me stir you up, my brothers and sisters, to happiness this morning.

"Why should the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?
Come, cease to groan, and loudly sing
A psalm of gladsome praise."

What a blessed task is mine,—to urge my brethren to be happy! How highly favoured are you to be exhorted to so delicious a privilege. When happiness becomes a duty who will not be glad? What a blessed people are they to whom to be delighted is but to obey the divine command; to whom rejoicing in the Lord is an obligation as well as a privilege.

My brethren, I would urge you to rejoice this morning, because if you are indeed believers in Christ, you are "*a people saved by the Lord.*" If you only read as far as the word "saved" and there pause, what music there is in the words—"a people saved"! Not a people who may be saved, who are in process of being saved, but a people saved; for he that believes in Jesus is saved. The work is done. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Unto us who are saved," says the apostle, not speaking of salvation as a future boon, but as a deed accomplished. It is ours at this very moment, for in Christ Jesus we are "*a people saved.*" The Israelites were saved from Pharaoh's domination. With a high hand and an outstretched arm did Jehovah bring them forth, even as at this day you and I are saved from the reigning power of sin. We are no longer held spell-bound by Satan so that we cannot bestir ourselves and seek after holiness. We are saved from the bondage of evil, even from the iron furnace of our ruling passions. The Israelites were saved also from the destroying angel. On that night when the avenger flew through the land and smote all the firstborn of Egypt, the blood mark on the lintel saved the families of Israel, and even so are we saved by the precious blood of Christ. No angel of vengeance can smite the man who is sheltered beneath the atoning blood; he shall feast securely when Egypt sends up her mighty cry. The chosen tribes were saved when Pharaoh pursued them and his hosts overtook them at the sea, even at the Red Sea. Then came the fiery cloudy pillar between Israel and Egypt, brightness to Israel but darkness to their foes. They could not come near them all that night, and in the morning Israel

was safe, for the Lord's redeemed marched on foot through the Red Sea, and saw their enemies no more; they were drowned in the midst of the sea, for God had saved his people. Even so has he saved us from being overtaken and overthrown by temptation, he has rescued us from the renewed attacks of the old, corrupt nature combined with the cunning of Satan,—he has saved us up to this hour from besetting sin and its fierce pursuit. When the people came into the wilderness they were like to have perished of thirst, but he saved them by bidding the crystal stream leap from the rock. They were ready to die of hunger, but he saved them, for the manna fell from heaven round about their camp. They were attacked by Amalek when they were weary, but he saved them, for Joshua's sword and Moses' outstretched hands brought victory for them till their foes were utterly defeated. Israel knew what it was to be saved in many ways, and so do we. We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, fed with the bread of heaven, and made to drink of water from the Rock of Ages; and as for our adversaries, they have not been able to harm us, for the Lord has saved us unto this day.

Mark the emphasis which Moses puts here, "*A people saved by the Lord.*" You and I know that if we are saved at all it is of the Lord. We cannot talk of merit; we abhor the very word. Nor dare we attribute our salvation to our own free will: free grace must wear the crown if ever we are saved. Bethink you, brethren, what a blessing it is to have a salvation which is altogether divine. If you had saved yourself, that poor work of yours would, like all man's work, one day pass away; but salvation is of the Lord, and therefore it will stand for ever. It is God that appointed and arranged it, even the Father who is the God of our election; it is Jesus who wrought it out, even the Son who is the God of our redemption; and it is the Holy Spirit who applies it, even the Holy Ghost, who is the God of our regeneration and our sanctification. The Triune God has wrought all our works in us and for us, glory be to his name. "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!" I wish I could speak as I feel this morning, I would fire your hearts with enthusiasm towards him who loved you before the earth was, who, having chosen you, purchased you with a price immense, brought you out from among the rest of mankind by his power, separated you unto himself to be his people for ever, and who now loves you with a love that will never weary nor grow cold, but will bring you unto himself and seat you at his right hand for ever and ever. You are saved. Remember that, O believer. Not half saved, but completely saved: saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end. Why, that one word "saved" is enough to make the heart dance as long as life remains. "Saved!" Let us hang out our banners and set the bells a-ringing. Saved! What a sweet sound it is to the man who is wrecked and sees the vessel going down, but at that moment discovers that the life-boat is near and will rescue him from the sinking ship. To be snatched from the devouring fire, or saved from fierce disease, just when the turning point has come, and death appears imminent, these also are occasions for crying, "Saved." But to be rescued from sin and hell is a greater salvation still, and demands a louder joy. We will sing it in life and whisper it in death, and chant

Will you not be happy after that? As you cower down beneath those mighty wings, even as the little chickens shelter under the hen, are you not happy? As you hide behind that mighty shield, do you not feel restful and contented? If not, pray that you may be, for so you ought to be.

Besides defensive armour we need offensive weapons, and we ought to be happy, in the next place, because we are *divinely armed*;—"Who is the sword of thy excellency." This wondrous word of God, when blessed by the Holy Spirit, is our sword with which to fight the battles of life. Does sin invade us? The precept smites it, and the story of Calvary slays it. Does the flesh rebel? The word of God smites the flesh and helps us to mortify it. Does Satan come against us? With "It is written" we meet him as our Master met him in the wilderness of old. There is no weapon like the word of God. This is the true Jerusalem blade that will cut through bone and marrow, which was never known to bend or break yet in the hour of conflict. Take thee good heed that thou have it by thee, gird it on thy thigh, and wield it well, for victory ever goeth with it.

We are armed with the word of God, not only that we may smite our own spiritual foes, but that we may win men for Christ. As the Israelites had to conquer Canaan, so have we to conquer the world for Jesus. Go ye up against the ramparts of error, go ye up against the hosts of evil, with no weapon in your hand but the story of the cross, the revelation of the Most High, the declaration of the gospel of Jesus, for by this sign we conquer: it is impossible that we should fail with the gospel in our hands. How happy God's people ought to be when they think of this. Armed with an invincible weapon, ought we not to rejoice in anticipation of victory? A man who has a Bible of his own—I mean not the paper and the letterpress, but all that is in the inspired volume,—is there anything more that he can desire? He finds from Genesis to Revelation every promise his, every dear assurance of almighty power and love all his own, what more doth he need? He who can use this two-edged sword may defy doubt, fear, anxiety, care, temptation, worldliness, yea, and death and the devil. At the very sight of this sword our adversaries tremble, for it cuts through joints and marrow, and leaves a deadly wound wherever it cuts. Be happy, Christian: the Lord help thee to be happy as thou seest this sword of the Spirit to be thine.

The fourth thing which is mentioned as a great privilege is that we have *security of victory*: "Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee." Now I ask any Christian man of experience here whether he has not found this true? What a shameless liar the devil is! What a many times he has been found a liar to us. "Ah," saith he, "in this trouble the hand of the Lord has gone out against you; he has forsaken you, and he will be gracious no more. He has deserted you as he did Saul the king, and henceforth dark and brooding thoughts will overshadow you which no musician's hand shall be able to charm away. The Lord will no more answer you from his holy oracle, for behold he has cast you away." But, brethren, we are not deserted after all, for here we are this morning to sing of divine lovingkindness, and to tell of all our past troubles as trials and proofs of eternal faithfulness. We are not in the

asylum, nor the prison, though the arch-enemy has threatened us with the one or the other. God has enabled us to triumph over all difficulties, though the enemy has predicted our utter defeat. The devil came to us once, and he said, "Now you will assuredly fall; already your heart is beginning to go back to sin; you are not faithful, you have been treacherous in your inmost thoughts, and you will apostatize altogether, and bring great disgrace upon your profession. You are a fool ever to have joined the church: there is no stability about you. You are a mere flash in the pan. You blazed like a firebrand, but you will die out into black ashes." But, beloved, we have not died out yet, blessed be Jehovah's name. Year after year has passed and the faint are still pursuing, the feeble still hold on their way, utter weakness still triumphs over strong temptations. Satan has been a liar to us, and so has that wicked unbelief of ours, which is rather worse than the devil, for at any rate it has less excuse for its existence. Unbelief has whispered a thousand accursed falsehoods in our ears: this labour was to be too difficult, that trial was to consume us, that adversary would swallow us up quick. Nothing of the kind has happened, but so our enemies said, and they have all been liars. What fools we were to have believed them, and what greater fools we shall be if in days to come we shall lend an ear to them. Let us not listen to anything which opposes itself to the sure truth of God. He cannot forsake us. Leave his chosen to perish? Cast away the people whom he did foreknow? Renounce the purchase of his blood, the darlings of his heart? Impossible! He may sooner cease to be than cease to be the Father of his own-begotten; he may sooner quench the sun and moon, and bid the whole universe pass away as the sere leaves fall from the forest trees, than he can ever say unto his children, "I have loved you, but not now; I have chosen you, but have cast you away; I have brought you thus far to put you to shame." No, beloved, his mercy endureth for ever, and never does he turn from his covenant. What a God you have to deal with! There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun! In the chapter from which our text is taken we see a singular God and a singular people: there is none like Jehovah, and none like his people. He is blessed for ever, and they are blessed for ever in him and by him. Therefore let us be happy this morning. O ye mourners, take down your harps from the willows and tune them afresh; put away the sackbut and take the dulcimer, and upon an instrument of ten strings praise the Lord. Let your heart now be glad in his name, and rejoice, yea exceedingly rejoice.

II. Secondly and briefly, LET US CONSIDER THE RESULT OF REALIZING OUR BLESSED ESTATE. Upon this subject there ought to be no need to dilate, for each heir of heaven should live in the hourly enjoyment of his divine inheritance, but, alas, few are doing so. Surely spiritual blessings are the only ones which men decline to enjoy. Bring a thirsty man near to a brimming cup and see how long he will linger. See how he hastens to enjoy the draught. Bring a poor man near an estate and tell him that he has but to sue the court to gain it, and to-morrow morning he will be asking where he has to go. Alas, Christian people seem to be stupid about their privileges; they are not so wise as the ass which knoweth its master's crib. They have great blessings,

it they do not always enjoy them; the good which the Lord provides set before them, but they do not grasp it as they should. May the holy Spirit teach us wisdom.

Now, there are many reasons why you should enjoy your privileges and be happy, and the first is because it tends to keep our allegiance to God unshaken. Israel would never seek after another god while she knew that none could bless her as Jehovah had done. Those who were happy with Jehovah would not be likely to wander off to Baal: God's people will not go astray from him when their hearts are thoroughly happy with him. It is because you lose the sweet flavour of the waters of the flowing fountain that you dabble in those muddy, stagnant gatherings which linger in the broken cisterns. If thou couldst delight thyself in the Lord all the world could not tempt thee from him. A man will never be dazzled with gold who has his heart satiated with God. Unhappy Christians, when tempted, are very apt to seek pleasure away from the Lord, but those who rejoice in the Lord always shall find the joy of the Lord to be their strength; for it shall be cords of love and bands of a man to hold them fast to their King. When our joy begins to slacken say to yourself, "There is something wrong here; I must get back to where I was in my earlier days; I must return to my God and to the sunlight, for now that I am in the cold shade my love may soon cool."

Beloved, if you will be happy it will create warm enthusiasm and a grateful love within your bosom. Have you begun to be lukewarm? Has your heart declined in affection? Nothing can make your soul return to its first love like the Lord's return and the restoration of the old happiness. Yes, I am saved; yes, I am shielded; yes, I bear the sword with which to smite my foes; yes, I shall triumph through the blood of the Lamb, and there is a portion for me at his right hand. Well, then, the next thought is, therefore blessed be his dear name, I do love him. I thought I did not, but when I begin to see what he has done for me, and what he has given me and provided for me, I find my sluggish heart beating at a quicker rate.

"Yes, I love him and adore,
Oh for grace to love him more."

That is a good result to come of being happy. "Therefore comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith the Lord; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem."

Joy also will have another effect: it will give you confidence to expect other blessings. Because God has dealt so well with us in the past, we are persuaded that goodness and mercy will follow us all our days. If now to-day, beloved, you will survey the goodness of God to you in the past, you will feel confidence that when new troubles arise you will be helped in them, and when new mercies are wanted they shall be supplied you, "new every morning." Gratitude for the past inspires us with courage for the future.

And so too you will gain strength for bearing all your burdens and courage for facing all your enemies. Has the Lord done so much to make us happy? Then he will not deny us anything. He who has given us so much already will be sure to sustain us and supply our

needs out of his all-sufficiency until we have trampled down every foe and shall rest for ever at his right hand.

Lastly, for Christians to be happy is one of the surest ways to set them seeking the salvation of others. If we found religion to be a bondage and a deception we should be inhuman if we wished to introduce others to it. He who enters upon a tyrant's service, with little food and no pay, and much misery, ought not to stand at the door and invite others to come in; he should rather warn them to seek some happier service. Now, we have found religion to be true happiness. I am sure I speak the sentiments of all here who know the Lord when I say that if we have not been perfectly happy it has not been the fault of God's grace, but entirely our own; for had we lived up to our calling and our privileges we should have been as happy as the birds of the air, and our lives would have been one perpetual song. Despite our shortcomings, blessed be God, we have been supremely happy. If we could begin life again we would only ask to begin it with Jesus, by the power of his Spirit. If we had our choice of all the various positions and conditions of our fellow-men we do not know one that we prefer to our own, so long as we can say, "Christ is mine."

Because we have found this honey we desire our friends and kinsfolk to partake of it. Oh, my hearers, I would you were all happy; I would you were every one of you supremely happy, and especially some of you into whose faces I have looked these many years, and see that you are not clear of your anxieties yet, not sure about your souls yet, but you still hesitate and linger in the border-land. O come ye and rest where God has provided rest for sinners' souls. Beloved, trust in Jesus Christ this morning; make no more delay. May his divine Spirit enable you so to do; then shall your peace be like a river, and you shall confess that we did not deceive you. You will cry, "The half has not been told me," when you perceive the deep peace, the holy calm, the blessed restfulness, and sometimes the ecstatic, overflowing delight which is the portion of the child of God. If I had to die like a dog, and there were no hereafter, I would still choose to be a Christian, for of all lives that can be lived there is none that can compare with this. We drink the wine on the lees well refined, and are satisfied with marrow and with fatness; but as for worldlings, they do but champ the husks that swine do eat, with which their bellies cannot be filled. The Lord grant his people grace to be happy in him, and may he also bring in the wanderers, for Jesus' sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Deuteronomy xxxiii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—89 (Ver. II.), 758, 787.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 17TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

On behalf of the Hospitals of London.

"And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."—Luke x. 25—37.

OUR text is the whole story of the Samaritan; but as that is very long, suppose, for our memories' sake, we consider the exhortation in the thirty-seventh verse to be our text. "*Go, and do thou likewise.*"

There are certain persons in the world who will not allow the preacher to speak upon anything but those doctrinal statements concerning the way of salvation which are known as "the gospel." If the preacher shall insist upon some virtue or practical grace they straightway say that he was not preaching the gospel, that he became legal, and was a mere moral teacher. We do not stand in any awe of such criticism, for we clearly perceive that our Lord Jesus Christ himself would very frequently have come under it. Read the Sermon on the Mount and

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judge whether certain people would be content to hear the like of it preached to them on the Sabbath. They would condemn it as containing very little gospel and too much about good works. Our Lord was a great practical preacher. He frequently delivered addresses in which he made answer to questioners, or gave direction to seekers, or upbraided offenders, and he gave a prominence to practical truth such as some of his ministers dare not imitate. Jesus tells us over and over again the manner in which we are to live towards our fellow-men, and he lays great stress upon the love which should shine throughout the Christian character. The story of the good Samaritan, which is now before us, is a case in point, for our Lord is there explaining a point which arose out of the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The question is legal, and the answer is to the point. But let it never be forgotten that what the law demands of us the gospel really produces in us. The law tells us what we ought to be, and it is one object of the gospel to raise us to that condition. Hence our Saviour's teaching, though it be eminently practical, is always evangelical: even in expounding the law he has always a gospel design. Two ends are served by his setting up a high standard of duty: on the one he slays the self-righteousness which claims to have kept the law by making men feel the impossibility of salvation by their own works; and, on the other hand, he calls believers away from all content with the mere decencies of life and the routine of outward religion, and stimulates them to seek after the highest degree of holiness—indeed, after that excellence of character which only his grace can give. This morning I trust that though I keep very much to practical points I shall be guided by the Spirit of holiness, and shall not really be guilty of legality, nor will any of you be led into it. I shall not hold up the love of our neighbour as a condition of salvation, but as a fruit of it. I shall not speak of obedience to the law as the road to heaven, but I shall show you the pathway which is to be followed by the faith which works by love.

Let us proceed to the parable at once.

I. Our first observation will be that **THE WORLD IS VERY FULL OF AFFLICTION**. This story is but one among a thousand based upon an unhappy occurrence. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves." He went upon a short journey, and almost lost his life on the road. We are never secure from trouble; it meets us around the family hearth, and causes us to suffer in our own persons or in those of the dearest relatives; it walks into our shops and counting-houses, and tries us; and when we leave home it becomes our fellow-traveller, and communes with us on the road. "Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

Frequently the greater afflictions *are not occasioned by the fault of the sufferer*. Nobody could blame the poor Jew that when he was going down to Jericho about his business the thieves beset him, and demanded his money, and that when he made some little resistance they wounded him, stripped him, and left him half dead. How could he be blamed? It was to him a pure misfortune. Believe me, there is a great deal of sorrow in the world which does not arise out of the vice or folly of the persons enduring it: it comes from the hand of God upon the sufferer,

not because he is a sinner above others, but for wise ends unknown to us. Now, this is the kind of distress which above all others demands Christian sympathy, and the very kind which abounds in our hospitals. The man is not to blame for lying there beaten and bruised: those gaping wounds from which his life is oozing are not of his own inflicting, nor received in a drunken brawl or through attempting a foolhardy feat; he suffers from no fault of his own, and therefore he has a pressing claim upon the benevolence of his fellow men.

Still, *very much distress is caused by the wickedness of others.* The poor Jew on the road to Jericho was the victim of the thieves who wounded him and left him half dead. Man is man's worst enemy. If man were but tamed to peace the wildest beast in the world would be subdued; and if evil were purged from men's hearts, the major part of the ills of life would cease at once. The drunkard's wastefulness and brutality, the proud man's scorn, the oppressor's cruelty, the slanderer's lie, the trickster's cheat, the heartless man's grinding of the faces of the poor,—these put together are the roots of almost all the poisonous weeds which multiply upon the face of the earth to our shame and sorrow. If dominant sins could be taken away, as blessed be God they shall when Christ has triumphed through the world, much of human sorrow would be assuaged. When we see innocent persons suffering as the result of the sin of others our pity should be excited. How many there are of little children starving, and pining into chronic disease through a father's drunkenness, which keeps the table bare! Wives, too, who work hard themselves are brought down to pining sickness and painful disease by the laziness and cruelty of those who should have cherished them. Work-people, too, are often sorely oppressed in their wages, and have to work themselves to death's door to earn a pittance. Those are the people who ought to have our sympathy when accident or disease bring them to the hospital gates "wounded and half dead."

The man in the parable was quite helpless, he could do nothing for himself; there he must lie and die, those huge wounds must bleed his very soul away unless a generous hand shall interfere. It is as much as he can do to groan; he cannot even dress his wounds, much less arise and seek a shelter. He is bleeding to death among the pitiless rocks of the descent to Jericho, and he must leave his body to be fed upon by kites and crows unless some friend shall come to his help. Now, when a man can help himself, and does not, he deserves to suffer; when a man flings away opportunities by his idleness or self-indulgence a measure of suffering ought to be permitted to him as a cure for his vices; but when persons are sick or injured, and are unable to pay for the aid of the nurse and the physician, then is the time when true-hearted philanthropy should promptly step in and do its best. So our Saviour teaches us here.

Certain paths of life are peculiarly subject to affliction. The way which led from Jerusalem to Jericho was always infested by robbers. Jerome tells us that it was called the "bloody way," on account of the frequent highway robberies and murders which were there committed; and it is not so long ago as to be beyond the memory of man that an English traveller met his death on that road, while even very recent

travellers tell us that they have been either threatened or actually attacked in that particularly gloomy region, the desert which goes down to the city of palm trees. So also in the world around us there are paths of life which are highly dangerous and fearfully haunted by disease and accident. Years ago there were many trades in which from want of precaution death slew its thousands. I thank God that sanitary and precautionary laws are better regarded, and men's lives are thought to be somewhat more precious. Yet still there are ways of life which may each be called "the bloody way": pursuits which are necessary to the community, but highly dangerous to those who follow them. Our mines, our railways, and our seas show a terrible roll of suffering and death. Long hours in ill-ventilated work-rooms are accountable for thousands of lives, and so are stinted wages, which prevent a sufficiency of food from being procured. Many a needlewoman's way of life is truly a path of blood. When I think of the multitudes of our working people in this city who have to live in close, unhealthy rooms, crowded together in lanes and courts where the air is stagnant, I do not hesitate to say that much of the road which has to be trodden by the poor of London is as much deserving of the name of the way of blood as the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. If they do not lose their money it is because they never have it: if they do not fall among thieves, they fall among diseases which practically wound them, and leave them half dead. Now, if you have not to engage in such avocations, if your pathway does not lead you from Jerusalem to Jericho, but takes you, perhaps, full often from Jerusalem to Bethany, where you can enjoy the sweetness of domestic love and the delights of Christian fellowship, you ought to be very thankful, and be all the more ready to assist those who for your sakes, or for the benefit of society at large, have to follow the more dangerous roads of life. Do you not agree with me that such persons ought to be among the first to receive of our Christian kindness? Such abound in our hospitals and elsewhere.

Let that stand: it is clear that there is a great deal of affliction in the world, and much of it is of the sort which deserves to be succoured at once.

II. Secondly, **THERE ARE MANY WHO NEVER RELIEVE AFFLICTION.** Our Saviour tells us of two at least who "passed by on the other side," and I suppose he might have prolonged the parable so as to have mentioned two dozen if he had chosen to do so, and even then he might have been content to mention but one good Samaritan, for I hardly think that there is one good Samaritan to two heartless persons. I wish there were, but I fear the good Samaritans are very few in proportion to the number who act the part of the priest and the Levite.

Now, notice who the persons were that refused to render aid to the man in distress.

First, they were *brought to the spot by God's providence on purpose to do so*. What better thing could the Lord himself do for the poor man half dead than to bring some man to help him? An angel could not well have met the case. How should an angel, never wounded, understand binding up wounds and pouring in wine and oil. No, a man was wanted who would know what was necessary, who would with brotherly sympathy cheer the mind while doctoring the body. In our English

version we read, "*By chance* there came down a certain priest that way;" but learned Greek scholars read it, "*By a coincidence.*" It was in the order of divine providence that a priest should come first to this afflicted person, that so he might go and examine the case as a man of education and skill, and then when the Levite came afterwards he would be able to carry on what the priest began; and if one could not carry the poor man, the two might between them be able to bear him to the inn, or one might remain to guard him while the other ran for help. God brought them to this position, but they wilfully refused the sacred duty which providence and humanity demanded of them. Now, you that are wealthy are sent into our city on purpose that you may have compassion upon the sick, the wounded, the poor, and the needy. God's intent in endowing any person with more substance than he needs is that he may have the pleasurable office, or rather let me say, the delightful privilege, of relieving want and woe. Alas, how many there are who consider that store which God has put into their hands on purpose for the poor and needy to be only so much provision for their excessive luxury, a luxury which pampers them but yields them neither benefit nor pleasure. Others dream that wealth is given them that they may keep it under lock and key, cankering and corroding, breeding covetousness and care. Who dares roll a stone over the well's mouth when thirst is raging all around? Who dares keep the bread from the women and the children who are ready to gnaw their own arms for hunger? Above all, who dares allow the sufferer to writhe in agony uncaared for, and the sick to pine into their graves unnursed? This is no small sin: it is a crime to be answered for to the Judge when he shall come to judge the quick and dead. Those people who neglected the poor man were brought there on purpose to relieve him, even as you are, and yet they passed by on the other side.

They were both of them persons, too, who ought to have relieved him, because *they were very familiar with things which should have softened their hearts.* If I understand the passage, the priest was coming down from Jerusalem. I have often wondered which way he was going, whether he was going up to the temple, and was in a hurry to be in time for fear of keeping the congregation waiting, or whether he had fulfilled his duty, and had finished his month's course at the temple and was going home. I conclude that he was going from Jerusalem to Jericho, because it says, "*By chance there came down a certain priest that way.*" Now to the metropolis it is always "going up": going up to London, or up to Jerusalem; and as this priest was coming down, he was going to Jericho. It was quite literally going down, for Jericho lies very low. I conclude that he was going home to Jericho, after having fulfilled his month's engagements in the temple, where he had been familiar with the worship of the Most High, as near to God as man could be, serving amidst sacrifices and holy psalms and solemn prayers, and yet he had not learned how to make a sacrifice himself. He had heard those prophetic words which say, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," but he was entirely forgetful of such teaching: he had often read that law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," but he regarded it not. The Levite had not been quite so closely engaged in the sanctuary as the priest, but he had taken his share in holy work,

and yet he came away from it with a hard heart. This is a sad fact. They had been near to God, but were not like him. Dear people, you may spend Sabbath after Sabbath in the worship of God, or what you think to be so, and you may behold Christ Jesus set forth visibly crucified among you, and themes which ought to turn a heart of stone to flesh may pass before your minds, and nevertheless you may return into the world to be as miserly as ever, and to have as little feeling towards your fellow men as before. It ought not to be so. I beseech you suffer it not to be so in any case again.

These two persons, moreover, were *bound by their profession to have helped this man*, for though it was originally said of the high priest yet I think it could be said of any priest that he was taken from among men, that he might have compassion. If anywhere there should be compassion towards men, it should be in the heart of the priest who is chosen to speak for God to men and for men to God. No stone should ever be found in his bosom; he should be gentle, generous-hearted kindly, full of sympathy and tenderness; but this priest was not so, nor was the Levite who ought to have followed in his wake. And oh, you Christian ministers, and all of you who teach in schools, or who undertake any service of Christian ministry—and you ought all to do so, for the Lord hath made all his people to be priests unto him—there ought to be in you from your very profession a readiness of heart towards the kindest actions for those who need them.

And there is one thing to be mentioned also against this priest and Levite, that *they were very well aware of the man's condition*. They came close to him and saw his state. It is a narrow trackway down to Jericho, and they were obliged to go almost over his wounded body: the first comer looked at him, but he hurried on; the second appears to have made a further investigation, to have had sufficient curiosity, at any rate, to begin to examine the state of the case; but his curiosity being satisfied his compassion was not aroused, and he hurried away. Half the neglect of the sick poor arises from not knowing that there are such cases, but many remain wilfully in ignorance, and such ignorance is no available excuse. In the case of the hospitals for which we plead to-day, you do know that there are persons in them at this moment suffering, persons suffering grievously, for no fault of their own, and you know that these need your aid. As I rode the other evening by that noble building on our side of the water, St. Thomas's Hospital, I could not help meditating upon what a mass of pain and suffering was gathered within those walls; but then I thanked God that it was within those walls where succour would be most surely rendered to it to the best of human ability. So you do know that there is poverty and sickness around you, and if you pass by on the other side you will have looked at it, you will have known about it, and on your heads will be the criminality of having left the wounded man unhelped.

Yet the pair had capital excuses: both the priest and the Levite had excellent reasons for neglecting the bleeding man. I never knew a man refuse to help the poor who failed to give at least one admirable excuse. I believe that there is no man on earth who wickedly rejects the plea of need who is not furnished with arguments that he is right: arguments eminently satisfactory to himself, and such as he thinks

should silence those who press the case. For instance, the priest and Levite were both in a hurry. The priest had been a month away at Jerusalem from his wife and dear children, and he naturally wanted to get home; if he lingered the sun might be down; it was an awkward place to be in after sundown, and you could not expect him to be so imprudent as to stay in a lone place with darkness coming on. He had spent a very laborious month in the temple, you do not know how exhausting he had found it to act as a priest for a whole month, and if you did you would not blame him for wanting to get home to enjoy a little rest. Besides, he had promised to be home at a certain hour, and he was a man of punctuality, and would by no means cause anxiety to his wife and children, who would be looking from the housetop for him. A very excellent excuse was this: but he also felt that he really could not do much good. He did not understand surgery, and could not bind up a wound to save his life; he shrank from it; the very sight of blood turned his stomach, he could not bring himself to go near a person who was so frightfully mangled. If he did try to bind up a wound he felt he should be sure to make a muddle of it. If his wife had been with him, she could have done it; or if he had brought some plaister, liniment, or strapping, he would have tried his best, but as it was he could do nothing. The poor man, moreover, was evidently half dead, and would be quite dead in an hour or two, and therefore it was a pity to waste time on a hopeless case. Then the priest was only one person, and could not be expected to carry a bleeding man, and yet it would be idle to begin with the case and leave him there all night. True, he could almost hear the sound of the Levite's feet, indeed he hoped he was coming up behind, for he felt very nervous at being alone with such a case; but then that was all the more reason for leaving the matter, since the Levite would be sure to attend to it. Better still was the following line of excuse—you would not have a person stop in a place where another man had been half killed by thieves. The thieves might be back again, they were scarcely yet out of hearing even then, and a priest after a month's service ought to have some fees in his purse, and it was important not to run the risk of losing the support of his family by stopping in a place which was evidently swarming with highwaymen. He might be wounded too, and then there would be two people half dead, and one of them a valuable clergyman. Really, philanthropy would suggest that you take care of yourself, as you could not possibly do any good to the poor man. And then the man might die, and the person found near the body might be charged with the murder. It is always awkward to be found alone in a dark spot with the corpse of one who has evidently suffered from foul play. The priest might be taken up upon suspicion, and did not all the principles of prudence suggest that the very best thing that he could do was to get out of the way as quickly as possible? Moreover, he could pray for the man, you know, and he was glad to find that he had a tract with him which he would leave near him, and what with the tract and the prayer what more could a good man be expected to do? With this pious reflection he hastened on his way. It is just possible also that he did not wish to be defiled. A priest was too holy a person to meddle with wounds and bruises. Who would propose such a thing? He had come from Jerusalem in all the

odour of sanctity ; he felt himself to be as holy as he could conveniently be, and therefore he would not expose such rare excellence to worldly influences by touching a sinner. All these powerful reasons put together made him content to save trouble, and leave the doing of kindness to others.

Now, this morning, I shall leave you to make all the excuses you like about not helping the poor and aiding the hospitals, and when you have made them they will be as good as those which I have set before you. You have smiled over what the priest might have said, but if you make any excuses for yourselves whenever real need comes before you, and you are able to relieve it, you need not smile over your excuses, the devil will do that ; you had better cry over them, for there is the gravest reason for lamenting that your heart is hard toward your fellow-creatures when they are sick, and perhaps sick unto death.

III. In the third place THE SAMARITAN IS A MODEL FOR THOSE WHO DO HELP THE AFFLICTED. He is a model, first, if we notice *who the person was that he helped*. The parable does not say so, but it implies that the wounded man was a Jew, and, therefore, the Samaritan was not of the same faith and order. The apostle says, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This man was not of the household of faith, as far as the Samaritan's judgment went, but he was one of the "all men." The Jew and he were as much apart in religious sympathy as they well could be. Ay, but he was a man : whether he was a Jew or not, he was a man, a wounded, bleeding, dying man, and the Samaritan was another man, and so one man felt for another man and came to his aid. Do not ask whether a sick man believes in the thirty-nine articles, or the Westminster Assembly's catechism. Let us hope that he is sound in the faith, but if he is not his wounds need staunching just as much as if he held a perfect creed. You need not enquire whether he is a sound Calvinist, for an Arminian smarts when he is wounded ; a Churchman feels as much pain as a Dissenter when his leg is broken, and an infidel needs nursing when he is crushed in an accident. It is as bad for a man to die with a heterodox creed as with the orthodox faith ; indeed, in some respects it is far worse, and therefore we should be doubly anxious for his cure. We are to relieve real distress irrespective of creed, as the Samaritan did.

Moreover, the Jews were great haters of the Samaritans, and no doubt this Samaritan might have thought, "If I were in that man's case he would not help me. He would pass me by and say, 'It is a Samaritan dog, let him be accursed.'" The Jews were accustomed to curse the Samaritans, but it did not occur to the good man to remember what the Jew would have said : he saw him bleeding and he bound up his wounds. Our Saviour has not given us for a golden rule, "Do ye to others as others would do to you," but "as ye would they should do to you." The Samaritan went by that rule, and though he knew of the enmity in the Jewish mind he felt that he must heap coals of fire upon the wounded man by loving help ; therefore he went straight away to his relief. Perhaps at another time the Jew would have put off the Samaritan and refused even to be touched by him ; but the tender-hearted sympathiser does not think of that : the poor man is too sick to hold any crotchets

or prejudices, and when the Samaritan bends over him and pours in the oil and wine he wins a grateful glance from the son of Abraham.

That poor, wounded man was one who *could not repay him*. He had been stripped of all that he had, even his garments were taken from him; but charity does not look for payment, else were it no charity at all. The man was a *total stranger* too. The Samaritan had not even seen him before. What did that matter? He was a man, and all men are akin. "God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth": the Samaritan felt that touch of nature which makes all men kin, and he bent over the stranger and relieved his pains.

He might have said, "Why should I help? He has been *rejected by his own people*; the priest and the Levite have left him; his first claim is upon his own countrymen." So have I known some say, "These persons have no claim; they ought to go to their own people." Well, suppose they have gone and failed, now comes your turn; and what the Jew would not do for the Jew let the Samaritan do, and he shall be blessed in the deed. He had been neglected by the officials and neglected by the saints; the best, or those who ought to be the best, the priest and the Levite, had deserted him, and left him to die. The Samaritan is neither saint nor official, but yet he steps in to do the deed. Oh, Christian brethren, take care that ye are not put to shame by this Samaritan.

He is a model to us next in *the spirit in which he did his work*. He did it without asking questions. The man was in need, he was sure of that, and he helped him at once; doing so without hesitation, and making no compact nor agreement with him, but at once proceeding to pour in the oil and wine. He did it without attempting to shift the labour from himself to others. Charity nowadays means that A asks B to help him, and B, in his wonderful charity, does him the great favour of sending him on to C. That is to say, the common run of benevolent persons nowadays put their hands but seldom into their own purses, but send people on to a few individuals who find cash for all. It seems to me to be a very mean way of getting rid of a case by saving your own pocket and passing the applicant on to another who is no better off than yourself, but far more generous. The Samaritan was personally benevolent, and therein he is a mirror and model to us all.

He did it without any selfish fear: the thieves might have been upon him, but he cared nothing for thieves when a life was in danger. Here is a man in want, and the man must be relieved, thieves or no thieves, and he does it. He does it with self-denial, for he finds oil and wine, and money at the inn, and everything, though he was by no means a rich man, for he gave two pence, a larger sum than it looks, but still a small sum. He did not fling his alms about because he was rich: he is not said to have given a handful of pence, but two, for he had to count his pence as he expended them. It was a poor Samaritan who did this rich and noble act: the poorest can help the poor; even those who feel distress themselves may manifest a generous Christian spirit, and give their services. Let them do so as they have opportunity.

This man helped his poor neighbour with great tenderness and care. He was like a mother to him. Everything was done with loving thought and with whatever of skill he possessed. He did the best he could.

Brethren, let what we do for others always be done in the noblest style. Let us not treat the poor like dogs to whom we fling a bone, nor visit the sick like superior beings who feel that they are stooping down to inferiors when they enter their rooms; but in the sweet tenderness of real love, learned at Jesu's feet, let us imitate this good Samaritan.

But *what did he do?* Well, first he came to where the sufferer was, and put himself into his position. Then he put forth all his skill for him, and bound up his wounds, no doubt rending his own garment to get the bands with which to bind up the wound. He poured in oil and wine, the best healing mixture that he knew of, and one which he happened to have by him. He then set the sick man on his mule, and of course he had to walk himself, but this he did right cheerfully, supporting his poor patient as the mule proceeded. He took him to an inn, but he did not leave him at the caravanserai and say, "Anybody will take care of him now," but he went to the manager of the establishment and gave him money, and he said, "Take care of him." I admire that little sentence, because it is first written, "he took care of him," and next he said, "Take care of him." What you do yourself you may exhort other people to do. He said, "I leave this poor man with you, pray do not neglect him. There are a great many people in the inn, but take care of him." "Is he a brother of yours?" "No, I never saw him before." "Well, are you at all under obligation to him?" "No!—yes, yes, I feel under obligation to everybody that is a man. If he wants help I am obliged to help him." "Is that all?" "Yes, but do take care of him. I feel a great interest in him."

The Samaritan did not cease till he had gone through with his kindness. He said, "This money may not be sufficient, for it may be a long time before he is able to move. That leg may not soon heal, that broken rib may need long rest. Do not hurry him away, let him stop here, and if he incurs additional expense, I will be sure to pay it when I come back from Jerusalem again." There is nothing like the charity which endures even to the end. I wish I had time to enlarge on all these things, but I cannot do so; exhibit them in your lives, and you will best know what they mean. Go and do likewise, each one of you, and thus reproduce the good Samaritan.

IV. But now, fourthly, WE HAVE A HIGHER MODEL than even the Samaritan—our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not think that our divine Lord intended to teach anything about himself in this parable, except so far as he is himself the great exemplar of all goodness. He was answering the question, "Who is my neighbour?" and he was not preaching about himself at all. There has been a great deal of straining of this parable to bring the Lord Jesus and everything about him into it, but this I dare not imitate. Yet by analogy we may illustrate our Lord's goodness by it. This is a picture of a generous hearted man who cares for the needy; but the most generous hearted man that ever lived was the Man of Nazareth, and none ever cared for sick and suffering souls as he has done. Therefore, if we praise the good Samaritan, we should much more extol the blessed Saviour whom his enemies called a Samaritan, and who never denied the charge, for what cared he if all the prejudice and scorn of men should vent itself on him?

Now, brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ has done better than the good

Samaritan, because our case was worse. As I have already said, the wounded man could not blame himself for his sad estate; it was his misfortune, not his fault; but you and I are not only half dead, but altogether dead in trespasses and sins, and we have brought many of our ills upon ourselves. The thieves that have stripped us are our own iniquities, the wounds which we bear have been inflicted by our own suicidal hand. We are not in opposition to Jesus Christ as the poor Jew was to the Samaritan from the mere force of prejudice, but we have been opposed to the blessed Redeemer by nature; we have from the first turned away from him. Alas, we have resisted and rejected him. The poor man did not put his Samaritan friend away, but we have done so to our Lord. How many times have we refused Almighty love! How often by unbelief have we pulled open the wounds which Christ has bound up! We have rejected the oil and wine which in the gospel he presents to us. We have spoken evil of him to his face, and have lived even for years in utter rejection of him, and yet in his infinite love he has not given us up, but he has brought some of us into his church, where we rest as in an inn, feeding on what his bounty has provided. It was wondrous love which moved the Saviour's heart when he found us in all our misery, and bent over us to lift us out of it, though he knew that we were his enemies.

The Samaritan was akin to the Jew because he was a man, but our Lord Jesus was not originally akin to us by nature: he is God, infinitely above us, and if he was "found in fashion as a man" it was because he chose to be so. If he journeyed this way, *via* Bethlehem's manger, down to the place of our sin and misery, it was because his infinite compassion brought him there. The Samaritan came to the wounded one because in the course of business he was led there, and, being there, he helped the man; but Jesus came to earth on no business but that of saving us, and he was found in our flesh that he might have sympathy with us. In the very existence of the man Christ Jesus you see the noblest form of pity manifested.

And being here, where we had fallen among robbers, he did not merely run risks of being attacked by thieves himself, but he was attacked by them: he was wounded, he was stripped, and not half dead was he, but altogether dead, for he was laid in the grave. He was slain for our sakes, for it was not possible for him to deliver us from the mischief which the thieves of sin had wrought upon us excepting by suffering that mischief in his own person; and he did suffer it that he might deliver us.

What the Samaritan gave to the poor man was generous, but it is not comparable to what the Lord Jesus has given to us. He gave him wine and oil, but Jesus has given his heart's blood to heal our wounds: "he loved us and gave himself for us." The Samaritan *lent* himself with all his care and thoughtfulness, but Christ *gave* himself even to the death for us. The Samaritan gave two pence, a large amount out of his slender store, and I do not depreciate the gift, but "he that was rich for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be rich." Oh, the marvellous gifts which Christ has bestowed upon us! Who is he that can reckon them! Heaven is among those blessings, but his own self is the chief boon.

The Samaritan's compassion did but show itself for a short time. If he had to walk by the side of his mule it would not be for many miles, but Christ walked by the side of us, dismounted from his glory, all through his life. The Samaritan did not stop long at the inn, for he had his business to attend to, and he very rightly went about it; but our Lord remained with us for a lifetime, even till he rose to heaven: yea, he is with us even now, always blessing the sons of men.

When the Samaritan went away he said, "Whatsoever thou spendest more I will repay thee." Jesus has gone up to heaven, and he has left behind him blessed promises of something to be done when he shall come again. He never forgets us. The good Samaritan, I dare say, thought very little of the Jew in after years; indeed, it is the mark of a generous spirit not to think much of what it has done. He went back to Samaria and minded his business, and never told anybody "I helped a poor Jew on the road." Not he. But of necessity our Lord Jesus acts differently, for because we have a constant need he continues to care for us, and his deed of love is being done, and done, and done again upon multitudes of cases, and will always be repeated so long as there are men to be saved, a hell from which to escape, and a heaven to win.

I have thus set before you the highest example, and I shall conclude when I have said two things. *Judge yourselves*, all ye my hearers, if ye are hoping for salvation by your own works. Look to what you must be throughout an entire life if your works are to save you. You must love God with all your heart and soul and strength, and your neighbour in this Samaritan's fashion, even as yourself, and both of these without a single failure. Have you done this? Can you hope to do it perfectly? If not, why do you risk your souls in this frail skiff, this leaky, sinking craft of your poor works, for you will never get to heaven therein?

Lastly, you who are Christ's people are saved, and you are not going to do these things in order to save yourselves: the greater Samaritan has saved you, Jesus has redeemed you, brought you into his church, put you under the care of his ministers, bidden us take care of you, and promised to reward us if we do so in the day when he comes. *Seek, then, to be true followers of your Lord* by practical deeds of kindness, and if you have been backward in your gifts to help either the temporal or the spiritual needs of men, begin from this morning with generous hearts, and God will bless you. O divine Spirit, help us all to be like Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke x. 17—42.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—92 (Vers. I.), 15, 428.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 24TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

"The righteous also shall hold on his way."—Job xvii. 9.

A man who is righteous before God has a way of his own. It is not way of the flesh, nor the way of the world; it is a way marked out him by the divine command, in which he walks by faith. It is the g's highway of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it: only the omed of the Lord shall walk there, and these shall find it a path of ration from the world. Once entered upon the way of life, the pil- must persevere in it or perish, for thus saith the Lord, "If any draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Perseverance ie path of faith and holiness is a necessity of the Christian, for "he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." It is in to spring up quickly like the seed that was sown upon the rock, and by-and-by to wither when the sun is up; that would but prove such a plant has no root in itself, but "the trees of the Lord are of sap," and they abide and continue and bring forth fruit, even in ge, to show that the Lord is upright. There is a great difference reen nominal Christianity and real Christianity, and this is generally in the failure of the one and the continuance of the other. Now, declaration of the text is that the truly righteous man shall hold on way; he shall not go back, he shall not leap the hedges and wander he right hand or the left, he shall not lie down in idleness, neither l he faint and cease to go upon his journey; but he "shall hold on way." It will frequently be very difficult for him to do so, but will have such resolution, such power of inward grace given him, t he will "hold on his way," with stern determination, as though he l on by his teeth, resolving never to let go. Perhaps he may not ays travel with equal speed; it is not said that he shall hold on his s, but he shall hold on his way. There are times when we run and not weary, and anon when we walk are thankful that we do not it; ay, and there are periods when we are glad to go on all fours

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and creep upward with pain; but still we prove that "the righteous shall hold on his way." Under all difficulties the face of the man whom God has justified is steadfastly set towards Jerusalem; nor will he turn aside till his eyes shall see the King in his beauty.

This is a great wonder. It is a marvel that any man should be a Christian at all, and a greater wonder that he should continue so. Consider the weakness of the flesh, the strength of inward corruption, the fury of Satanic temptation, the seductions of wealth and the pride of life, the world and the fashion thereof: all these things are against us, and yet behold, "greater is he that is for us than all they that be against us," and defying sin, and Satan, and death, and hell, the righteous holds on his way.

I take our text as accurately setting forth the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. "The righteous shall hold on his way." Years ago when there was an earnest, and even a bitter controversy between Calvinists and Arminians it was the habit of each side to caricature the other. Very much of the argument is not directed against the real sentiment of the opposite party, but against what had been imputed to them. They made a man of straw, and then they burned him, which is a pretty easy thing to do, but I trust we have left these things behind. The glorious truth of the final perseverance of the saints has survived controversy, and in some form or other is the cherished belief of the children of God. Take care, however, to be clear as to what it is. The Scripture does not teach that a man will reach his journey's end without continuing to travel along the road; it is not true that one act of faith is all, and that nothing is needed of daily faith, prayer, and watchfulness. Our doctrine is the very opposite, namely, that the righteous shall hold on his way; or, in other words, shall continue in faith, in repentance, in prayer, and under the influence of the grace of God. We do not believe in salvation by a physical force which treats a man as a dead log, and carries him whether he will it or not towards heaven. No, "he holds on," he is personally active about the matter, and plods on up hill and down dale till he reaches his journey's end. We never thought, nor even dreamed, that merely because a man supposes that he once entered on this way he may therefore conclude that he is certain of salvation, even if he leaves the way immediately. No, but we say that he who truly receives the Holy Ghost, so that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall not go back, but persevere in the way of faith. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and this he cannot be if he were left to go back and delight in sin as he did before; and, therefore, he shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Though the believer to his grief will commit many a sin, yet still the tenor of his life will be holiness to the Lord, and he will hold on in the way of obedience. We detest the doctrine that a man who has once believed in Jesus will be saved even if he altogether forsook the path of obedience. We deny that such a turning aside is possible to the true believer, and therefore the idea imputed to us is clearly an invention of the adversary. No, beloved, a man, if he be indeed a believer in Christ, will not live after the will of the flesh. When he does fall into sin it will be his grief and misery, and he will never rest till he is cleansed from guilt; but I will say this

f the believer, that if he could live as he would like to live he would live a perfect life. If you ask him if, after believing, he may live as he lists, he will reply, "Would God I could live as I list, for I desire to live together without sin. I would be perfect, even as my Father in heaven is perfect." The doctrine is not the licentious idea that a believer may live in sin, but that he cannot and will not do so. This is the doctrine, and we will first *prove it*; and, secondly, in the Puritanic sense of the word, we will briefly *improve it*, by drawing two spiritual lessons therefrom.

I. LET US PROVE THE DOCTRINE. Please to follow me with your Bibles open. You, dear friends, have most of you received as a matter of faith the doctrines of grace, and therefore to you the doctrine of final perseverance cannot require any proving, because it follows from all the other doctrines. We believe that God has an elect people whom he has chosen unto eternal life, and that truth necessarily involves the perseverance in grace. We believe in special redemption, and this secures the salvation and consequent perseverance of the redeemed. We believe in effectual calling, which is bound up with justification, a justification which ensures glorification. The doctrines of grace are like a chain—if you believe in one of them you must believe the next, for each one involves the rest; therefore I say that you who accept any of the doctrines of grace must receive this also, as involved in them. But I am about to try to prove this to those who do not receive the doctrines of grace; I would not argue in a circle, and prove one thing which you doubt by another thing which you doubt, but "to the law and to the testimony," so the actual words of Scripture we shall refer the matter.

Before we advance to the argument it will be well to remark that those who reject the doctrine frequently tell us that there are many cautions in the word of God against apostatizing, and that those cautions can have no meaning if it be true that the righteous shall hold on his way. But what if those cautions are the means in the hand of God of keeping his people from wandering? What if they are used to excite a holy fear in the minds of his children, and so become the means of preventing the evil which they denounce. I would also remind you that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which contains the most solemn warnings against apostasy, the apostle always takes care to add words which show that he did not believe that those whom he warned would actually apostatize. Turn to Hebrews vi. 9. He has been telling these Hebrews that if those who had been once enlightened should fall away, it would be impossible to renew them again into repentance, and he adds, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." In the 10th chapter he gives an equally earnest warning, declaring that those who should do despite to the spirit of grace are worthy of sorer punishment than those who despised Moses' law, but he closes the chapter with these words, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of his soul." Thus he shows what the consequences of apostasy would be, but he is convinced that they will not choose to incur such a fearful doom.

Again, objectors sometimes mention instances of apostasy which are mentioned in the word of God, but on looking into them it will be discovered that these are cases of persons who did but profess to know Christ, but were not really possessors of the divine life. John, in his first Epistle, ii. 19, fully describes these apostates: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The like is true of that memorable passage in John, where our Saviour speaks of branches of the vine which are cut off and cast into the fire: these are described as branches in Christ that bear no fruit. Are those real Christians? How can they be so if they bear no fruit? "By their fruits ye shall know them." The branch which bears fruit is purged, but it is never cut off. Those which bear no fruit are not figures of true Christians, but they fitly represent mere professors. Our Lord, in Matt. vii. 22, tells us concerning many who will say in that day "Lord, Lord," that he will reply, "I never knew you." Not "I have forgotten you," but "I never knew you": they were never really his disciples.

But now to the argument itself. First we argue the perseverance of the saints, most distinctly *from the nature of the life which is imparted at regeneration*. What saith Peter concerning this life? (1 Peter i. 23.) He speaks of the people of God as "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." The new life which is planted in us when we are born again is not like the fruit of our first birth, for that is subject to mortality, but it is a divine principle, which cannot die nor be corrupt; and, if it be so, then he who possesses it must live for ever, must, indeed, be evermore what the Spirit of God in regeneration has made him. So in 1 John iii. 9 we have the same thought in another form. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." That is to say, the bent of the Christian's life is not towards sin. It would not be a fair description of his life that he lives in sin; on the contrary, he fights and contends against sin, because he has an inner principle which cannot sin. The new life sinneth not; it is born of God, and cannot transgress; and though the old nature warreth against it, yet doth the new life so prevail in the Christian that he is kept from living in sin. Our Saviour, in his simple teaching of the gospel to the Samaritan woman, said to her (John iv. 13), "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Now, if our Saviour taught this to a sinful and ignorant woman, at his first interview with her, I take it that this doctrine is not to be reserved for the inner circle of full-grown saints, but to be preached ordinarily among the common people, and to be held up as a most blessed privilege. If you receive the grace which Jesus imparts to your souls, it shall be like the good part which Mary chose, it shall not be taken away from you; it shall abide in you, not as the water in a cistern, but as a living fountain springing up unto everlasting life.

We all know that the life given in the new birth is intimately

connected with faith. Now, faith is in itself a conquering principle. In the First Epistle of John, which is a great treasury of argument (1 John v. 4) we are told, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" See, then, that which is born of God in us, namely, the new life, is a conquering principle ; there is no hint given that it can ever be defeated : and faith, which is its outward sign, is also in itself triumphant evermore. Therefore of necessity, because God has implanted such a wondrous life in us in bringing us out of darkness into his marvellous light, because he has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, because the eternal and ever blessed Spirit hath come to dwell in us, we conclude that the divine life within us shall never die. "The righteous shall hold on his way."

The second argument to which I shall call your attention shall be drawn from our Lord's own express declarations. Here we shall look to the gospel of John again, and in that blessed third of John, where our Lord was explaining the gospel in the simplest possible style to Nicodemus, we find him laying great stress upon the fact that the life received by faith in himself is eternal. Look at that precious verse, the fourteenth :—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up : that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Do men therefore believe in him and yet perish ? Do they believe in him and receive a spiritual life which comes to an end ? It cannot be, for "God gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish" : but he would perish if he did not persevere to the end ; and therefore he must persevere to the end. The believer has eternal life, how then can he die, so as to cease to be a believer ? If he does not abide in Christ, he evidently has not eternal life, therefore he shall abide in Christ, even to the end. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To this some reply that a man may have everlasting life and lose it. To which we answer, the words cannot so mean. Such a statement is a self-evident contradiction. If the life be lost the man is dead ; how, then, did he have everlasting life ? It is clear that he had a life which lasted only for a while : he certainly had not everlasting life, for if he had it he must live everlastingly. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John iii. 36). The saints in heaven have eternal life, and no one expects them to perish. Their life is eternal ; but eternal life is eternal life, whether the person possessing it dwells on earth or in heaven.

I need not read all the passages in which the same truth is taught ; but further on, in John vi. 47, our Lord told the Jews, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life : " not temporary life, but "everlasting life." And in the 51st verse he said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." Then comes that famous declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, if there were no other at all, would be quite sufficient to prove our point. John x. 28 : "And I give

unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any" (the word "man" is not in the original) "pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." What can he mean but this, that he has grasped his people, and that he means to hold them securely in his mighty hand?

"Where is the power can reach us there,
Or what can pluck us thence?"

Over and above the hand of Jesus which was pierced comes the hand of the omnipotent Father as a sort of second grasp. "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Surely this must show that the saints are secure from anything and everything which would destroy them, and consequently safe from total apostasy.

Another passage speaks to the same effect—it is to be found in Matthew xxiv. 24, where the Lord Jesus has been speaking of the false prophets that should deceive many. "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect;" which shows that it is impossible for the elect to be deceived by them. Of Christ's sheep it is said, "A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers," but by divine instinct they know the voice of the Good Shepherd, and they follow him.

Thus has our Saviour declared, as plainly as words possibly can express it, that those who are his people possess eternal life within themselves, and shall not perish, but shall enter into everlasting felicity. "The righteous shall hold on his way."

A very blessed argument for the safety of the believer is found in *our Lord's intercession*. You need not turn to the passage, for you know it well, which shows the connection between the living intercession of Christ and the perseverance of his people—"Wherefore also he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews vii. 25). Our Lord Jesus is not dead; he has risen, he has gone up into the glory, and now before the eternal throne he pleads the merit of his perfect work, and as he pleads there for all his people whose names are written on his heart, as the names of Israel were written on the jewelled breastplate of the high priest, his intercession saves his people even to the uttermost. If you would like an illustration of it you must turn to the case of Peter which is recorded in Luke xxii. 31, where our Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The intercession of Christ does not save his people from being tried, and tempted, and tossed up and down like wheat in a sieve, it does not save them even from a measure of sin and sorrow, but it does save them from total apostasy. Peter was kept, and though he denied his Master, yet it was an exception to the great rule of his life. By grace he did hold on his way, because not only then, but many a time beside, though

he sinned, he had an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

If you desire to know how Jesus pleads, read at your leisure at home that wonderful 17th of John—the Lord's prayer. What a prayer it is ! "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name : those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition ; that the scripture might be fulfilled." Judas was lost, but he was only given to Christ as an apostle and not as one of his sheep. He had a temporary faith, and maintained a temporary profession, but he never had eternal life or he would have lived on. Those groans and cries of the Saviour which accompanied his pleadings in Gethsemane were heard in heaven, and answered. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me"; the Lord does keep them by his word and Spirit, and will keep them. If the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane was answered, how much more that which now goeth up from the eternal throne itself !

"With cries and tears he offered up
His humble suit below ;
But with authority he asks,
Enthroned in glory now.

"For all that come to God by him,
Salvation he demands ;
Points to their names upon his breast,
And spreads his wounded hands."

Ah, if my Lord Jesus pleads for me I cannot be afraid of earth or hell : that living, intercessory voice hath power to keep the saints, and so hath the living Lord himself, for he hath said—"Because I live ye shall live also." (John xiv. 19.)

Now for a fourth argument. We gather sure confidence of the perseverance of the saints *from the character and work of Christ*. I will say little about that, for I trust my Lord is so well known to you that he needeth no word of commendation from me to you ; but if you know him you will say what the apostle does in 2 Tim. i. 12,—*"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."* He did not say *"I know in whom I have believed,"* as most people quote it, but, *"I know whom I have believed."* He knew Jesus, he knew his heart and his faithfulness, he knew his atonement and its power, he knew his intercession and its might ; and he committed his soul to Jesus by an act of faith, and he felt secure. My Lord is so excellent in all things that I need give you but one glimpse of his character and you will see what he was when he dwelt here among men. At the commencement of John xiii. we read, *"Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."* If he had not loved his disciples to the end when here we might conclude that he was changeable now as then ; but if he loved his chosen to the end while yet in his humiliation below, it bringeth us the sweet and blessed confidence that now he is in heaven he will love to the end all those who confide in him.

Fifthly, we infer the perseverance of the saints from *the tenor of the*

covenant of grace. Would you like to read it for yourselves? If so, turn to the Old Testament, Jeremiah xxxii., and there you will find the covenant of grace set forth at some length. We shall only be able to read the fortieth verse: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." He will not depart from them, and they shall not depart from him,—what can be a grander assurance of their perseverance even to the end? Now, that this is the covenant of grace under which we live is clear from the Epistle to the Hebrews, for the apostle in the 8th chapter quotes that passage to this very end. The question runs thus—"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." The old covenant had an "if" in it, and so it suffered shipwreck; it was—"If you will be obedient then you shall be blessed"; and hence there came a failure on man's part, and the whole covenant ended in disaster. It was the covenant of works, and under it we were in bondage, until we were delivered from it and introduced to the covenant of grace, which has no "if" in it, but runs upon the strain of promise; it is "I will" and "You shall" all the way through. "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." Glory be to God, this covenant will never pass away, for see how the Lord declares its enduring character in the book of Isaiah (liv. 10): "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." And again in Isaiah lv. 3: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." The idea of falling utterly away from grace is a relic of the old legal spirit, it is a going away from grace to come under law again, and I charge you who have once been manumitted slaves, and have had the fetters of legal bondage struck from off your hands, never consent to wear those bonds again. Christ has saved you, if indeed you are believers in him, and he has not saved you for a week, or a month, or a quarter, or a year, or twenty years, but he has given to you eternal life, and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of his hands. Rejoice ye in this blessed covenant of grace.

The sixth most forcible argument is drawn from the *faithfulness of God*. Look at Romans xi. 29: what saith the apostle there, speaking by the Holy Ghost? "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," which means that he does not give life and pardon to a man and call him by grace and afterwards repent of what he has done, and withdraw the good things which he has bestowed. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." When he putteth forth his hand to save he doth not withdraw it till the work is accomplished. His word is, "I am the Lord, I change

not ; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed " (Mal. iii. 6). "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent " (1 Sam. xv. 29). The apostle would have us ground our confidence of perseverance upon the confirmation which divine faithfulness is sure to bestow upon us. He says in 1 Cor. i. 8, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that *ye* may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom *ye* were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." And again he speaks to the same effect in 1 Thess. v. 24, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." It was of old the will of God to save the people whom he gave to Jesus, and from this he has never turned, for our Lord said (John vi. 39), "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Thus you see from these passages, and there are numbers of others, that God's faithfulness secures the preservation of his people, and "the righteous shall hold on his way."

The seventh and last argument shall be drawn *from what has already been done in us*. I shall do little more than quote the Scriptures, and leave them to sink into your minds. A blessed passage is that in Jeremiah xxxi. 3 : "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love : therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." If he did not mean that his love should be everlasting he would never have drawn us at all, but because that love is everlasting therefore with lovingkindness has he drawn us. The apostle argues this in a very elaborate manner in Romans v. 9, 10 : "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." I cannot stop to show how every word of this passage is emphatic, but so it is : if God reconciled us when we were enemies, he certainly will save us now we are his friends, and if our Lord Jesus has reconciled us by his death, much more will he save us by his life ; so that we may be certain he will not leave nor forsake those whom he has called. Do you need me to bring to your minds that golden chapter, the 8th of Romans, the noblest of all language that was ever written by human pen ? "Whom *ye* did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called ; and whom he called, them he also justified ; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." There is no break in the chain between justification and glory : and no supposable breakage can occur, for the apostle puts that out of all hazard, by saying, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ?" Then he heaps on all the things that might be supposed to separate, and says, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In the

same manner the apostle writes in Philippians i. 6. "Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." I cannot stay to mention the many other Scriptures in which what has been done is made an argument that the work shall be completed, but it is after the manner of the Lord to go through with whatever he undertakes. "He will give grace and glory," and perfect that which concerneth us.

One marvellous privilege which has been bestowed upon us is of peculiar significance : we are one with Christ by close, vital, spiritual union. We are taught of the Spirit that we enjoy a marriage union with Christ Jesus our Lord—shall that union be dissolved ? We are married to him. Has he ever given a bill of divorce ? There never has been such a case as the heavenly bridegroom divorcing from his heart a chosen soul to whom he has been united in the bonds of grace. Listen to these words from the prophecy of Hosea ii. 19, 20. "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever ; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness : and thou shalt know the Lord."

This marvellous union is set forth by the figure of the head and the body : we are members of the body of Christ. Do the members of his body rot away ? Is Christ amputated ? Is he fitted with new limbs as old ones are lost ? Nay, being members of this body, we shall not be divided from him. "He that is joined unto the Lord," says the apostle, "is one spirit," and if we are made one spirit with Christ, that mysterious union does not allow of the supposition of a separation.

The Lord has wrought another great work upon us, for he has sealed us by the Holy Spirit. The possession of the Holy Ghost is the divine seal which sooner or later is set upon all the chosen. There are many passages in which that seal is spoken of, and is described as being an earnest, an earnest of the inheritance. But how an earnest if after receiving it we do not attain the purchased possession ? Think over the words of the apostle in 1 Cor. i. 21, 22 : "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." To the same effect the Holy Spirit speaks in Eph. i. 13, 14 : "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation : in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Beloved, we feel certain that if the Spirit of God dwelleth in us, he that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead will keep our souls and will also quicken our mortal bodies and present us complete before the glory of his face at the last.

Therefore we sum up the argument with the confident expression of the apostle when he said (2 Tim. iv. 18), "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

II. Now, how shall we IMPROVE THE DOCTRINE PRACTICALLY ?

The first improvement is *for encouragement to the man who is on the road to heaven*. "The righteous shall hold on his way." If I had to take a very long journey, say from London to John o' Groats, with my poor tottering limbs to carry me, and such a weight to carry too, I might begin to despair, and, indeed, the very first day's walking would knock me up: but if I had a divine assurance unmistakeably saying, "You will hold on your way, and you will get to your journey's end," I feel that I would brace myself up to achieve the task. One might hardly undertake a difficult journey if he did not believe that he would finish it, but the sweet assurance that we shall reach our home makes us pluck up courage. The weather is wet, rainy, blustering, but we must keep on, for the end is sure. The road is very rough, and runs up hill and down dale; we pant for breath, and our limbs are aching; but as we shall get to our journey's end we push on. We are ready to creep into some cottage and lie down to die of weariness, saying, "I shall never accomplish my task;" but the confidence which we have received sets us on our feet, and off we go again. To the right-hearted man the assurance of success is the best stimulus for labour. If it be so, that I shall overcome the world, that I shall conquer sin, that I shall not be an apostate, that I shall not give up my faith, that I shall not fling away my shield, that I shall come home a conqueror—then will I play the man, and fight like a hero. This is one of the reasons why British troops have so often won the fight, because the drummer-boys did not know how to beat a retreat, and the rank and file did not believe in the possibility of defeat. They were beaten oftentimes by the French, so the French tell us, but they would not believe it, and therefore would not run away. They felt like winning, and so they stood like solid rocks amidst the dread artillery of the foe till victory declared on their side. Brethren, we shall do the same if we realize that we are preserved in Christ Jesus, kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Every true believer shall be a conqueror, and hence the reason for warring a good warfare. There is laid up for us in heaven a crown of life that fadeth not away. The crown is laid up for us, and not for chance comers. The crown reserved for me is such that no one else can wear it; and if it be so, then will I battle and strive to the end, till the last enemy is overcome, and death itself is dead.

Another improvement is this: *what an encouragement this is to sinners who desire salvation*. It should lead them to come and receive it with grateful delight. Those who deny this doctrine offer sinners a poor twopenny-halfpenny salvation, not worth having, and it is no marvel that they turn away from it. As the Pope gave England to the Spanish king—if he could get it—so do they proffer Christ's salvation if a man will deserve it by his own faithfulness. According to some, eternal life is given to you, but then it may not be eternal; you may fall from it, it may last only for a time. When I was but a child I used to trouble myself because I saw some of my young companions, who were a little older than myself, when they became apprentices and came to London, become vicious; I have heard their mother's laments, and seen their tears about them; I have heard their fathers expressing bitterest sorrow over the boys whom I knew in my class

to be quite as good as ever I had been, and it used to strike me with horror that I perhaps might sin as they had done. They became Sabbath-breakers; in one case there was a theft from the till to go into Sunday pleasuring. I dreaded the very thought; I desired to maintain an unsullied character, and when I heard that if I gave my heart to Christ he would keep me, that was the very thing which won me; it seemed to be a celestial life assurance for my character, that if I would really trust Christ with myself he would save me from the errors of youth, preserve me amid the temptations of manhood, and keep me to the end. I was charmed with the thought that if I was made righteous by believing in Christ Jesus I should hold on my way by the power of the Holy Spirit. That which charmed me in my boyhood is even more attractive to me in middle life: I am happy to preach to you a sure and everlasting salvation. I feel that I have something to bring before you this morning which is worthy of every sinner's eager acceptance. I have neither "if" nor "but" with which to dilute the pure gospel of my message. Here it is: "He that believeth and is baptized *shall be saved*." I dropped a piece of ice upon the floor yesterday, and I said to one who was in the room, "Is not that a diamond?" "Ah," he said, "you would not leave it on the floor, I warrant you, if it were a diamond of that size." Now I have a diamond here—eternal life, everlasting life! Methinks you will be in haste to take it up at once, to be saved now, to be saved in living, to be saved in dying, to be saved in rising again, for ever and ever, by the eternal power and infinite love of God. Is not this worth having? Grasp at it, poor soul; thou mayest have it if thou dost but believe in Jesus Christ, or, in other words, trust thy soul with him. Deposit thine eternal destiny in this divine bank, then thou canst say, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John x. 1—30.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—245, 668, 738.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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MOURNING FOR CHRIST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 1ST, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications : and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."—Zechariah xii. 10.

SEE, beloved, whence every good thing flows—"I will pour upon the house of David the spirit of grace." The starting point is the Lord's sovereign act in giving the Spirit. Every work of grace begins with God ; no gracious thought or act ever originates in the free will of unregenerate man. The Lord is first in all things which are acceptable in his sight. It is God that "worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." "Thou hast wrought all our works in us."

Then notice how exceedingly effectual the work of the Lord is. Men may persuade, and even inspired prophets may warn, without effect, but when the Lord putteth his hand to the work he never fails ; as soon as ever he says "I will pour," the next sentence is, "and they *shall* look." When he works, who shall hinder ? His people shall be willing in the day of his power. "They *shall* look upon me whom they have pierced, and they *shall* mourn." This is effectual calling indeed. In such results we see what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

Observe, thirdly, the dignity and the prominent position which is occupied by faith. "I will pour upon them the spirit of supplication, and they shall look." Faith is evidently intended here, for faith is ever that glance of the eye which brings to us the blessing which Christ has to bestow. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up : that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." A look at the brazen serpent healed Israel, and, according to the figure, believing in Jesus Christ is a saving look. Now, this faith-look is mentioned as the first fruit of the Spirit : before they

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mouth they look; when the spirit of grace and supplication is given its principal result is looking unto Jesus.

But now see what a choice fruit follows upon faith: a soft, sweet, mellow fruit of the Spirit—"They shall mourn *for him* as one that mourneth for his only son." This sorrow is a sweet bitter, a delicious grief, full of all manner of rare excellencies. It is a peculiar order of mourning, and differs greatly from the sorrow of the world, which worketh death. Those who mourn in this fashion are made sorry after a godly manner, for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of. Mark, it is *godly* sorrow or repentance *towards God*. Its speciality is that it looks Godward, and weeps because of grieving *him*. The lamentation described in the text is a mourning *for Christ*. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn *for him* as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness *for him*, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." This is a very remarkable peculiarity of true spirit-wrought repentance: it fixes its eye mainly upon the wrong done to the Lord by its sin. No other repentance but that which is evangelical looks in that direction. The repentance of ungodly men is a horror at their punishment, an alarm at the dire result of their transgressions. They repent like Esau, not of eating the pottage, but of losing the birthright: they see sin only in reference to themselves and their fellow men, but its higher bearings in reference to the Lord they quite ignore. The ungodly at times, and especially in the hour of death, feel remorse, but it has nothing to do with God, unless it be that they tremble at his justice, and fear the punishment which he executes: it is, after all, pure selfishness; they are sorry because they are about to suffer the consequences of their rebellion. Evangelical repentance sympathizes with the Great Father, and grieves that he should have been so sadly provoked. See it in David: "Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." See it in the prodigal: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." See how it was wrought in Saul of Tarsus, for the voice from heaven said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?" It was sin as against the exalted Saviour which struck home to Paul's heart and laid him low at the feet of his Lord. All true repentance has this for its special mark, that it is attended with evident reconciliation to God, since it now regrets the wrongs done to him. One sure seal of its genuine spirituality is that it is a lamentation on account of the dishonour which sin has done to God and to his Christ. We are going to view the special case before us from that point of view, and work it out in three or four ways.

I. First, according to our text, when the spirit of grace is given, THERE WILL BE A SPECIAL MOURNING FOR CHRIST ON THE PART OF ISRAEL. You must take the text in its primary significance, for we must treat the word of God fairly. There will come a day when the ancient people of God, who have so long rejected Jesus of Nazareth, will discover him to be the Messiah, and then one of their first feelings will be that of deep humiliation and bitter regret before God. They will mourn as at the mourning of Hadadrimmon, when the beloved

Josiah fell in battle, and all good men knew that the light of the nation was quenched. "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen." They justly mourned for pious Josiah, for he was the last of their godly kings, and the full shower of wrath began to fall upon Judah when he was taken from the evil to come. Right well also will it be for them to mourn bitterly as a nation, when they discern the Lord whom they have pierced, for is there not a cause? *They had a peculiar interest in the Messiah*, for it was to them, and almost to them only, that his coming was clearly revealed. God spoke of him to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the fathers. It was from their race that the Messiah was to come. It is no small honour to Abraham's seed that the man Christ Jesus is one of them. It was a Judean virgin of whom he was born, and to Israel he is indeed bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. When he came on earth, he confined his ministry to them: of them he said, "I am not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He healed their sick, he opened the eyes of their blind ones, and raised their dead. It was in their streets that he delivered his gracious messages of love; and when he was gone it was in their chief city that the preaching of the gospel began, and the Holy Spirit was poured out. "Go ye and teach all nations," said he, "beginning at Jerusalem." It was from among the Jews that the first vanguard of the church's host was chosen. The first to preach the gospel were of the house of Israel, and they might have been to this day in the very front of the army, peculiarly adapted as they are in many respects to lead the way in the teaching of a pure faith, but they judged themselves unworthy, and therefore the ministers of Christ, though chosen from themselves, were obliged to say, "We turn unto the Gentiles." Then came their casting away for a time, during which season their own Messiah is despised and blasphemed by the nation which ought to have received him with exultation. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

Their rejection of the Lord Jesus was most determined, and carried to the utmost length. It was not sufficient for that generation in which Jesus lived to turn a deaf ear to his admonitions, they must needs seek his life. Once they would have cast him headlong from the brow of a hill, at another time they took up stones again to stone him, and at last they did take him and bear false witness against him, fiercely seeking his blood. By their malice he was given over to the Romans and put to death, not because the Romans desired to slay him, but because the clamour of the multitude was, "Crucify him, crucify him;" and their voices prevailed with Pilate. They imprecated on their heads his blood, saying, "His blood be on us and on our children." They pushed the rejection of the King of the Jews to the utmost possible extreme, for they rested not till he hung upon the shameful tree, and life remained no more in him. Peter said, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." How bitterly then will they lament when that ignorance is removed! They will mourn as one who has lost his firstborn and only child, as for a loss never to be repaired.

men of great attainments and abilities who will extol our Lord's manhood, and even profess to be in love with his character, but they will not yield him divine honours. Oh, thou Son of God, to whom the Father bare witness by an audible voice out of heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him,"—they reject the witness of God and so dishonour thee. Thou didst not count it robbery to be equal with God, but they fain would pierce thee in thy divinity, and make thee nothing but a man. Men also reject our Lord's atonement. By many that truth is obscured or utterly denied! I hear still the cry in many quarters, "Let him come down from the cross and we will believe on him." Modern philosophers will accept anything except the bleeding Substitute for guilty man. When I think of the false doctrine which is preached about the Lord Jesus, and how his glory is tarnished by the lips of his professed ministers, who think his gospel a worn-out tale, I see that there is, indeed, occasion for us to get us to our chambers, and there pour out our hearts in lamentation. Alas, my Lord, why art thou thus blasphemed by the worldly wise? Why is thy truth despised among the learned and ridiculed by the scribes?

I do not know when my grief has been more stirred for my Lord and Master than when brought actually to see *the superstition* by which our holy faith is travestied and his blessed name blasphemed. Turning from scepticism, where he is wounded in the house of his enemies, you come to superstition, where he is wounded in the house of his professed friends, and what wounds they are! I have felt sometimes as if I could tear down the baby image held in the Virgin's hands, when I have seen men and women prostrate before it. What, O ye sons of Antichrist, could ye not make an idol, like the Egyptians, out of your cats and dogs, or find your gods in your gardens? Could ye not make a golden calf, as Israel did in the wilderness, or borrow the fantastic shapes of India's deities? Could nothing content you till the image of the holy child Jesus should be made into an idol, and Christ upon the cross uplifted should be set up as an image for men to bow before it? The idolatry which worships the image of the devil is less blasphemous than that which worships the image of Christ. It is an awful sacrilege to make the holy Jesus appear to be an accomplice in the violation of the divine command; yea, and to turn that blessed memorial of death into an idolatrous rite in which divine honours are given to a piece of bread. Was there ever sin like unto this sin? Thou, innocent Saviour, it is grief indeed to think that thou shouldst be set up in the idol temple, among saints and saintesses, and that men should think that they are honouring God by breaking his first and second commands. This must be to our Lord the most loathsome of all things under heaven. How doth he in patience bear it? Let not his people behold it without a mourning like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon, because our blessed Christ is so blasphemed by Antichrist that the image of the incarnate Son of God is set up as an object of idolatrous worship.

There should be great sorrow and mourning when we read the history of the past, and look even at the present, at *the fearful wrongs which have been done in the name of Jesus*. Jesus is all love and tenderness, and yet they place his cross upon the blood-stained banners of accursed

war. Jesus, who said, "Put up thy sword into its sheath, for they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," is nevertheless adjured to go forth with armed hosts to blow men to pieces with guns, or pierce them with bayonets. When the Spanish nation captured Peru and Mexico, it makes one's blood boil to read that, while they murdered the defenceless people for their gold, they set up in every town the holy cross. What had the cross to do with their murders and robberies? They tortured their victims in the name of Jesus, and when they put them to death they held up before them the image of the crucified Jesus. What horrors have been wrought in thy name, O Christ of God! Men have, indeed, pierced thee, and they who take thy name and call themselves of "the Society of Jesus" have been chief enactors of these abominations. Thy crucifixion at Calvary is a small part of the matter; for the sons of men have gone on piercing thee by maligning thee thus infamously, thou Lord of boundless love.

And now to-day, what is done in our land? I can scarcely stay to enlarge, but there are multitudes of things done in the name of the religion of Christ which are a dishonour to it. Under the pretence of guarding the interests of his church, a certain community of professing Christians beg that their fellow Christians may not be buried within the same enclosure as themselves; forsooth, Christ's name must sanction such un-Christly bigotry! One section of the church must also be patronized and made dominant in the land, and this wrong is done in the name of Jesus. It is to honour him that this crying injustice is perpetrated! Hear it, ye heavens! There are multitudes of things besides, which I shall not mention, for which the Christian church ought perpetually to sorrow. That she does wrong is enough to make her be humble; but that she has dared often to do wrong, even in the very name of Jesus, is worst of all.

Still, brethren, the worst sorrow probably for us all is that there should be *so many professing Christians who act in a manner the very opposite to what Christ would have them do*. The heathen everywhere point to our countrymen, who are supposed to be Christians, and they say of us that we are the most drunken race of men upon the face of the earth; and I suppose we are. Charges are brought against us which are supported by the conduct of our sailors and soldiers, and others who go abroad, which make the followers of Mahommed and the disciples of Brahminism to think their religion superior to our own. These Englishmen are supposed to be Christians, though they are not. This is a great scandal and a grievous sorrow under the sun.

And then in the very heart of it all lies this, that *true Christians*, those who are truly Christ's blood-bought, regenerated people, nevertheless *do not sufficiently bring glory to his name*. Where is the zeal of the Church—the all-consuming zeal of other days? Where is the consecration which ought to rest upon all members of Christ's blood-bought body? Where, I say, is that mightiness in prayer and supplication which at the first so gloriously prevailed? Where is that spirit of hearty love and unity; of brotherly kindness and compassion, which ought to be seen in all Christians? The first church brought great honour to the name of Christ: does the church of to-day do the like? Do even the most spiritual portions of the church bring to the

Lord Jesus such honour and glory as he ought to have? Judge ye what I say. Are we not all unprofitable servants? Is there not cause for mourning, and for great mourning too, to think that Jesus should thus have been ill-treated by friends and foes? For him, our best beloved, perpetually pierced, the Church may well proclaim a fast, and mourn before the Lord, as in the day of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.

III. Suffer now a word or two upon the third point, for THE TEXT SPEAKS OF A FAMILY MOURNING. It will be a very blessed day indeed when we see this, when the spirit of grace and supplication shall be largely poured out, and the land shall mourn, every family apart. Have you ever seen this in your households? Where the Spirit of God really rests upon a family there will be much of it, and surely there is cause enough for it in some families where there is none at all. We ought to grieve to think that there has been such formality and coldness in family devotion, so little love to Jesus manifested in the morning and evening worship. I fear that there are professing families where daily prayer is altogether neglected. The individuals, I trust, pray in their chambers, but they have given up the assembling of themselves as families to worship in the name of Jesus; as families they are prayerless and dishonour the Lord. Herein is serious cause for sorrow, because our Lord loses by this neglect that which he delights in, namely, family praises.

Families should also mourn because the Lord is not so regarded as he should be in family management. Christ is not made first and chief in family matters. Fathers look rather to the worldly prosperity of their boys in placing them out, than to their moral and spiritual advantage. Many a time marriages for the daughters are sought, not in the Lord, but solely in reference to pecuniary considerations. How much of the arrangement of the household ignores the existence of the Saviour: as for instance—much work done on the Sabbath which might be spared by a little care and thought, and consequent inability to go out to worship the Saviour with the rest of God's people. There is a way of setting the Lord always before us in the management of household matters, and, on the other hand, there is a way of so acting as to prove that God is not in the least considered. For family quarrels, family pride, family covetousness, and family sins of all kinds, which bring shame upon our profession, and dishonour upon the name with which we are named, there ought to be great sorrow.

If there be any members of a family unconverted, this should cause to the whole household deep regret. If there be but one child unsaved, the whole should plead for him with tears. Happy are you who have all your household walking in the faith; but if there be one left out, weep not for the dead, neither bewail him, but weep for the living who is dead unto his Lord. Wife, be grieved in your heart if you have a worldly husband. O husband, mourn for thine unconverted wife! If you have brothers or sisters not yet brought to Jesus, fail not to lament concerning them. I would to God that families did sometimes come together to pay their vows with special care, and that the father would confess family faults and family sins in the name of them

all, and so acknowledge each wound given to the Lord in that house. I am not alluding to those private rebukes which every wise parent must give, but I would have a common confession from all, uttered by the voice of the head of the household. Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, how blessed it is to think that thou art the God of all the families of Israel, and that thou lovest the tents of Jacob well. Grant that our households, as households, inasmuch as they sin and transgress, may also walk before thee in all humbleness. Let all families mourn: let the house of David mourn, for there is sin in royal and noble families. Let the house of Levi repent, for, alas, there are sins in ministers' families which greatly provoke the Lord our God. The house of Shimei, of whom we know nothing, may represent the private families which are unknown, and of the humbler order; let these also draw near to God in penitential grief. The house of Nathan may be regarded as the prophetic; or perhaps as the princely house; but be they what they may, let them all come before the Most High, each with the language of confession. It will be a grand thing for England when we shall see more family piety and family mourning for sin. They tell us that in Cromwell's day if you went down Cheapside at a certain hour in the morning every blind of every house was down, because the inmates were at family prayer. It was then a standing ordinance of all professors of religion, and it was the great buttress against Popery. Modern Ritualists want us to go to church every morning and night to pray; the church is opened all day long, so I see by a notice on one of our churches, *for private prayer*: it strikes me as being rather a place for *public prayer*, and well adapted for the *display* of devotion. The idea that prayer is more acceptable in the parish church than in your own houses is a superstition, and ought to be treated with no respect. If we will pray in our families, and make every house into a church, and consecrate every room by private supplication, we shall not be fascinated by the foolish idea of the holiness of places or priests, and we shall so be guarded against the seductions of Popery. The Lord pour out the spirit of grace upon all the families of his people!

IV. But now, lastly, and more personally: according to the text, when the Spirit of God is given, there will be **PERSONAL, SEPARATE, AND SALUTARY MOORNING ON THE PART OF EACH ONE**. "Every family apart, and their wives apart," these words, often repeated, bring out vividly the individuality of this holy sorrow before the Lord. Let us now endeavour to enter into it.

First, dear brethren and sisters, let us mourn that our sins occasioned our Lord's death; and when we have done this, which would naturally be the first thought from the text, and therefore will naturally occur to you without my needing to urge it, let us go on to mourn our sins *before our regeneration*. To me it will ever cause regret that I was unbelieving towards One who could not lie. Now, as I know my Lord, and have proved his faithfulness so well, it looks so strangely cruel that I should have doubted him, that I should have thought he could not cleanse me, or that he would not receive me. He is the tenderest of all hearts, the most loving of all beings, and yet there was a day when I thought him a severe tyrant who expected a preparation of me which I could not produce in myself. I did not know that he would take me

just as I was and blot out my sin; I know it now, but I mourn that I so grievously belied him. Ought we not to grieve over our long carelessness? You used to hear the gospel, dear friend, and you understood its plan and scope, but you did not wish to feel its power: the Son of God in pity came to die for you, and yet you thought it an everyday matter to be attended to at your convenience, and you went your way to mind earthly things. O Lord, how could I shut the door of my heart against thee so long, when thy head was wet with dew and thy locks with the drops of the night? Thou didst gently knock, and knock again, my God, and yet I would not let thee in for many a year! Sorrowfully would I repent for this.

Think then, dear friends, of the contempt which we cast upon Christ while we were living in that state of carelessness; for did we not as good as say in our heart, "Pleasure is to be found in the world and not in Christ; rest is to be had in wealth, not in Jesus"? Did we not deliberately choose when we were young to follow the devices of our own hearts instead of the will of Jesus? Now that we know him we think ourselves ten thousand fools that we should have seen any charms in the painted face of that Jezebel world, when Jesus stood by with all his matchless beauties. Forgive us, dear Redeemer, that we ever thought of these trifles, these transitory toys, these mockeries, and let thee go though it were but for an hour. Alas, this base contempt of thee was no error of an hour, but a crime which lasted many years. Pardon us, O Lord.

Let us reflect, again, with great regret upon the resistance which we offered to Christ. In some of us the Spirit strove mightily. I do confess that under sermons I was oftentimes brought to my knees and driven to my chamber with tears, but the next morning saw those tears evaporate, and I was as obdurate as before. Did Jesus persuade us to come to his wedding feast? Did he put his arms about our neck and say, "Come and receive my love?" By his tenderness did he persuade us, and by his terrors did he threaten us, and yet did we resist him? What a crime is this! Look at him now! Oh, look at him with his dear wounds and his face marred more than any man! Did we push *him* aside? Did we contend with him who only meant our good? Did we not by this conduct pierce our Lord? It was even so. Alas, for those dark days! Let the whole of our life before conversion be counted but as a breathing death. Write down its days as nights, and let the nights perish and be forgotten for ever.

But we have more than this to reflect upon, namely, *our sins since conversion*. Do I address any this morning who have grievously backslidden since they professed faith in Christ? Have you committed great and open sins? Has it even been found necessary to remove you from the church of God as the leper is put out from the camp? Then do not think of it without feeling your eyes swim in tears. What is justly bound by the church on earth is bound in heaven, and therefore do not despise the censure of the church of God. And if others of us have been kept—as I trust we have—from the great transgression, yet, beloved, what shall we say? Are there not with us, even with us, many sins against the Lord? We too have often been guilty of mistrust. We have doubted the Lord, who is truth itself. What a stab at his heart is this! What a re-opening of his veins! We have been

gloomy sometimes, and full of murmuring, until men have said that Christians are miserable, and they have taken up a proverb against our holy faith because we have been despondent, and have not felt the joy of the Lord. This is wounding him in the house of his friends, and for this evil let us mourn.

Might not our Beloved charge lukewarmness upon very many who would be unable to deny the accusation? Lukewarm towards the bleeding Lamb—towards the dear lover of our souls! Have we not been disobedient too, leaving undone certain duties because they were unpleasant to the flesh, and doing other things which we know we ought not to have done, because we chose to please ourselves? This is a sad state of things to exist between our hearts and our best Beloved.

Has there not been in us a very great want of self-denial? What a little we have ever given to him! Did we ever pinch ourselves for him? Might he not say to us, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices; but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." And how little zeal we have shown for him. Zeal has just lingered on, like a spark in the flax unquenched; but how little flame has there been, how little love for God, how little love for perishing sinners, how little love even for Christ's own people. How scant has been our fellowship with Jesus. I know some who, I hope, love him, who go from day to day without hearing his voice, and some will even live a week in that condition. Shame! shame! to live a month in the same house with our heart's husband, and not to have a word with him! It is sad indeed, that he, who should be all in all to us, should often be treated as if he were second best, or nowhere in the race. Alas, alas, Christ is all excellence, and we are all deficiency. In him we may rejoice, but as to ourselves, we ought to mourn like doves because of the griefs we must have caused to his Holy Spirit through the ill estate of our souls.

We have asked you, and I pray the Spirit of God to enable you, to mourn over the past, but what shall we say as to *the present*? Take stock now of last week. I invite myself and you, for we are one in Christ if we are believers, to look through last week. Did you make any survey of the days as they passed? If so I think you might have said with Dr. Watts—

"What have I done for him that died
To save my guilty soul?
How are my follies multiplied,
Fast as my minutes roll."

Has it been a week of real service for Christ? You have done something, did you do your best? Did you throw your heart into it? Did you feel that tenderness, when you were trying to bring others to Christ, which a Christian ought to feel? You had some little contention with another, did you act in a Christian spirit? Did you show the mildness and gentleness of Jesus? You were offended, did you forgive freely? for his dear sake did you cast it all behind your back? You have been somewhat in trouble, did you take your burden to him as naturally as a little child runs to its mother with a cut finger? Did

you tell him all, and leave it all to him? You had a loss, did you voluntarily resign all to his will? Has there been no pride this week? Pride grieves him very much, for he is not a proud Master, and is not pleased with a proud disciple. Has there not been much to mourn over?

And now at this very moment what is the state of our feeling toward him? Must we not confess that though there is a work of grace in our souls, yet there is much about us at this moment which should make us bow down in grief before the Lord. Dear Saviour, thou knowest there is not one in this house who has more cause to mourn for thee than he does who speaks for thee now; for he feels that these poor lips are not able to tell what his heart feels, and his heart does not feel what it ought. A preacher should be like a seraph. One who speaks for Christ, and tries to praise him, should be a very Niobe when he sees the sin of men and his own. Where are my tears? The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak. Methinks what I have now said of myself will suit most of you who are engaged in my Master's service. Do you not feel that you blunder at it, that when you would paint him you make a daub of his likeness? When you would set him forth visibly crucified among the people, do you not obscure him with the very words with which you wish to reveal him? You must have such feelings, and if you have them let me close by reading these words to you; they are assuredly true when there is a time of hearty, sincere mourning for Jesus: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." So let us plunge into the sacred bath. Believing in the precious blood, let us wash and be clean. Glory be to his name, those whom he has washed are clean every whit. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Zechariah xii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—429, 278, 287.

ERROR.—To our intense regret we perceive that upon page 370 of the last Sermon the Printer has inserted a verse from the First Epistle to the Corinthians instead of from the Second. This entirely spoils our argument: will the reader kindly correct his copy? put 2 Corinthians for 1 Corinthians, and mark out the misquoted words. The error was occasioned by a slip of our pen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SUDDEN SORROW.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 8TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment."—Jeremiah iv. 20.

"And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?"—Jeremiah iv. 30.

JEREMIAH was describing the havoc of war, a war which was devastating his country and bringing untold miseries upon the people. He says of it, "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?" How grateful we ought to be that war is not raging in our own land. We should read those terrible stories which come to us concerning the destruction of human life by the two armies in the East with the utmost regret. On whichever side the victory may turn it is still to be daily lamented that men should slaughter men, and glory in wholesale murder. How true it is neither the elements in their fury, nor wild beasts in their rage, have ever been such terrible enemies to man as men. We should thank God that we dwell apart, and see our harvests ripening without the dread of their being reaped by invaders; we walk our streets without the fear of bursting shells, and seek our chambers without the apprehension of being awakened in the dead of night by the shouts of advancing adversaries. Blessed be the Lord who has given centuries of peace to the fertile hills and valleys of his chosen isle.

"O Britain, praise thy mighty God,
And make his honours known abroad;
He bade the ocean round thee flow;
Not bars of brass could guard thee so."

No. 1,363.

Let the name of Jehovah our God be praised this morning, for giving peace in our borders, and filling us with the finest of the wheat.

There are, however, in this land, and in all lands, whether at war or peace, many calamities which come suddenly upon the sons of men, concerning which they may bitterly lament, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment." This world at its best is not our rest. There is nothing settled below the moon. We call this *terra firma*, but there is nothing firm upon it; it is tossed to and fro like a troubled sea evermore. We are never for any long time in one stay; change is perpetually operating. Nothing is sure but that which is divine; nothing is abiding except that which cometh down from heaven. All things change as they pass before us, and perish in the using. At this moment your ship lies becalmed: be not too secure, for within the next few minutes you may be driving before a hurricane with bare poles. To-day your garden is planted with blooming flowers, which are loading the air with their perfume; rejoice not too much in their sweetness, for within a short time nothing may remain, the spoiler may tear them up by the roots, and your garden may become a desolation. There is nothing bright, beautiful, fair, lovely, or desirable beneath the sun which may not be speedily withered. Even as a vision are all these things; they are, and lo, they are not. They flash upon us as the meteor which blazes in the midnight sky, and then leaves the darkness to be blacker than before. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow," yea, boast not thyself of to-day, lest haply on that morrow, or even in this very day, thou mayest have to cry with Jeremiah, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment."

This expression may be, without any straining, very readily applied to many matters, and to three especially. First, *to the sudden spoiling of all human righteousness*; secondly, *to the sudden spoiling of all earthly comfort*; and, thirdly, and this is by no means an unusual thing, *to the sudden spoiling of human life itself*. May the Holy Spirit bless our meditations upon the instability of all earth-born things, that so we may despise the things which are seen and temporal, and follow after the things unseen and eternal.

I. A SUDDEN SPOILING HAPPENS TO HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS. Beloved, when I put those two words together, "*human righteousness*," I inwardly smile; it sounds like a comedy, or a satire, I scarce know which. "What is man that he should be clean? and he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous?" Mere human nature and righteousness are two things not easily joined together, and when they are united for a time they soon separate, for they agree no better than oil and water. There is a divine righteousness, wrought out by our dear Redeemer and imputed to all his believing people, which will remain:

"That glorious robe the same appears
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new."

But the righteousness which comes of man is a dream—how suddenly doth it vanish from our view. Lighter than the gossamer's web, more

subtle than the mist, more fleeting than the wind, the very name of it is vanity.

Let us look at the history of human righteousness, and begin in the garden of Eden, and lament *the fall*. Human righteousness existed in the bowers of Paradise, and man was happy with his God. Adam was created sinless, his mind was upon an equal balance, and without tendency to evil. He was placed in a garden of delights, with but one commandment to test him, and that a very simple one, costing but slight self-denial to obey. We do not know how long Adam was in the garden, but we know that man being in honour continueth not, and in a very short time he and our mother Eve were spoiled of all that they had. The serpent crept in and beguiled them; he who was a murderer from the beginning plundered them. How suddenly were their tents spoiled, and their curtains in a moment, for their eyes were opened, and they perceived that they had lost all. The righteousness which covered them much better than a vesture had been taken from them, so that they were utterly naked before the eyes of the living God. He is a cruel spoiler indeed who strips a man of every garment, but thus completely were our first parents robbed and despoiled: they found that they had lost the garden wherein they had lived in such content, lost peace, lost happiness, lost themselves, lost their posterity, lost all. Everything was taken from them except that which infinite mercy stepped in to give them in the form of a gracious promise concerning the restoring seed of the woman. Whenever we think of the Fall we ought to be humbled, and to be restrained from all idea of self-righteousness, for if Adam in his perfection could not maintain his righteousness, how can you and I, who are imperfect from the very birth, hope to do so? If the thieves broke in and stole our ancestor's righteousness, when his tent was pitched amid the sunny glades of Eden, how much more will our curtains be despoiled in this land of the Ishmaelite and the Amalekite? If the old, wily serpent found a way into the unfallen hearts of our first parents, when they had no surroundings to mislead them, how vain is it for us to hope to overcome the evil one so as to attain to everlasting life by the works of the law.

A second instance of this very commonly occurs in *the failure of the moralist's resolutions*. See yonder young people, tutored from their childhood in everything that is good: their character is excellent and admirable, but will it so abide? Will not the enemy despoil their tents? Often is it so. The young man starts in life with the conviction that he is not of the common herd of sinners, and will never descend to their level. He has heard of other youths who have fallen into temptation, and destroyed themselves by dissipation, but he feels certain that he shall do nothing of the kind. Like Hazael, he cries, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" He fancies that his barque can weather all storms, and he plumes himself upon the idea that the record of his life will be very different from that of other men. How truly lovely at first sight he seems! How honest, generous, and true! Even looking upon him with the eyes of Jesus, we might love him, and only mourn that he lacks one thing. The righteousness which he wears is a merely human one, and it is altogether in his own keeping, but he believes that he shall hold it fast, and never let it go. His tent is so well

pitched that no wind from the wilderness will ever overturn it. Have not these delusions been sadly dispelled in hundreds of instances? A fierce temptation arises, and the man's resolutions are carried along thereby like thistle-down in the wind. The young man did not think that such a temptation could ever happen to him. He had been kept by his parents and friends like a flower in a conservatory, and he could not believe that the nights could be so bitterly frosty in the cold world outside; but now he has to feel the nipping influence of sin, and he withers speedily. Satan, discovering his weakness, takes him at a tender point, brings before him that lust to which he has the greatest tendency, sets before him that dainty delicacy of sin to which he has the sweetest tooth, and by-and-by the hopeful youth can no longer talk of his virtues nor boast of his purity, for he has fallen low. The ship Boastful has struck on a rock, and is going down. The self-confident young man now finds himself to be human; being human, to be liable to temptation; being tempted, to be ready to yield to sin. "I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction, and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble," for the cords of resolution are broken and the stakes of principle are loosed. Alas, poor human righteousness, thou art soon smitten on the forehead, and speedily rolled in the dust. How soon does the comeliness of human nature pass away in the hour of trial!

Many a young man and young woman, opening their eyes on a sudden after temptation, have had to cry, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment." Ah, ye that think yourselves beyond all danger of falling into sin ye know not yourselves; ye understand not the plague of your own hearts, for if ye did ye would see that ye carry within your souls all manner of iniquity, which only waits for an opportunity to develop itself, and when it finds a fit occasion it will display its deadly nature, and then you will mourn that you did not seek a new heart and a right spirit at the hand of Christ.

My second text says, "And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" And I would earnestly answer it for any of you who have gone through this experience. Do not try to re-establish that righteousness of yours which has been so thoroughly spoiled, but look for something better. Quit the tent for a mansion, flee from the curtains of self to the walls of salvation. Your own resolutions have failed you, therefore leave such a sandy foundation and build upon the rock of divine strength! Go and confess your sin with deep contrition; ask the Lord Jesus to wash you in his precious blood, and then desire truth in the inward parts, and ask that in the hidden part the Holy Spirit may make you to know wisdom. So shall it come to pass that you shall no longer build upon the sand, nor yet with wood and hay and stubble, but on the rock with gold and silver and precious stones.

Another liability of human righteousness is one which I must not call a calamity, seeing it is the commencement of the greatest blessing: I mean when the Spirit of God comes to deal with human righteousness, by way of *illumination and conviction*. Here we can speak of what we know experimentally. How beautiful our righteousness is, and how it flourishes like a comely flower till the Spirit of God blows upon it, and then it withers quite away, like the grass in the hot sirocco. The first lesson of the Holy Ghost to the heart is to lay bare its deceivableness, and to

incover before us its loathsomeness, where we thought that everything was rue and acceptable. What a different character you gave yourself, dear friend, before the Spirit of God dealt with you, to what you were counselled to give afterwards. Truly, your beauty consumed away like a moth. You began to mourn over your holiest things, for you saw the sin which polluted them; and as for your transgressions, which you thought so little of, when the Spirit of God set them in a true light you found them to be hideous and horrible offences against the God of love. Aforetime you emblazoned your name in letters of gold, but when you earned the truth you chose a black inscription, and with a heavy hand you wrote out your own condemnation, feeling that you were bound to do so. Now, it is a great mercy when the Spirit of God brings home the truth to the heart and makes a man see the deceptiveness of outward appearances. I pray that it may happen to you all if it never has done so. May your tents be spoiled until you see yourselves to be utterly undone; for you are so by nature whether you see it or not.

I would ask all who are under conviction of sin to answer this question, "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" May you reply, "We know what we will do. We will flee away from self to Jesus. Our precious things are removed, and our choice treasure is taken from us; therefore do we take the Lord Jesus to be our all in all." If such be your resolve, you are fulfilling the end and design of the ever blessed Spirit, who worketh in order to wean man from self and to hide pride from him. For this cause doth he plunge man into the ditch till his own clothes abhor him, for then he turns to Jesus and seeks for that clothing which the matchless righteousness of Christ Jesus alone can afford.

But there will come to all human righteousness one other time of spoiling if neither of those should happen which I have mentioned before. *Remorse* will come, and that very probably in the hour of death, if not before. Apart from the Holy Spirit, conscience often does its work in a very terrific fashion, and tears to pieces before a man's eyes the curtains of righteousness which he had so laboriously woven. Have you never seen a sinner happy and contented, because self-deluded? But on a sudden he has found out that his falsehood and hypocrisy were known to God, and would be all exposed and punished. At such a time instead of turning to God, he has despaired and said, "I am lost, there is no hope for me," and therefore he has plunged into deeper sin and become a worse man, while all the while, like the vulture at Prometheus' liver, conscience has continued tearing away at his heart, eating into his very soul, and drinking the blood of joy out of his life, till he has been dried up by an anguish from which he could not escape. I have seen men die so; the consolations of the gospel have been sounded into a deaf ear, they have lifted up their hands as though they would thrust the minister away, when he talked of mercy they replied that there was none for them, and when he spoke of cleansing they declared that their sin was of more than scarlet hue, and never could be washed away. Oh, how suddenly are their tents spoiled, and their curtains in a moment, and when spoiled thus, what does a man do? What but give himself up to that everlasting despair, which has at last overtaken him. While any man is yet alive I would exhort him still to apply to Christ: though it were the last breath he breathed I would still hold up the Redeemer

before his expiring gaze, but when remorse has fully set in this is seldom of any avail. They cry, "Too late, too late!" they continue to refuse their Saviour, and pass away naked, and poor, and miserable, to stand before God's righteous bar to hear the sentence of their conscience confirmed for ever by the mouth of the Eternal Judge. In that dreadful day their overthrow will be terrible indeed. God save us from this.

I hope, dear friends, that all of us know what it is to have seen all our tents spoiled of all the precious things wherein our pride boasted itself, and that we have now become rich in the riches of the Lord Jesus, and secure in the cleft of the rock which was opened in his side. If we have so done we shall not regret, but greatly rejoice, that our tents were suddenly spoiled, and our curtains in a moment.

II. The words of our text are exceedingly applicable to THE SPOILING OF ALL EARTHLY COMFORTS. *Sudden destruction to all our earthly comforts is common to all sorts of men.* It may happen to the best as well as to the worst. Did it not so occur to Job, who on a certain morning was amazed by messenger after messenger hastening to tell him that all his property was swept away? Last of all came one who told him that his entire family had been destroyed by tempest. Sudden sorrow happened also to rebellious Pharaoh as well as to pious Job, for at the dead of night he was aroused to bewail the firstborn of him that sat upon the throne, and heard throughout all the land of Egypt a chorus of lamentations on account of a similar calamity which had happened to every household. Neither the just nor the unjust can tell when tribulation will befall them. David returns from among the Philistines and he finds Ziklag burned with fire, and his wives and his children carried away captive; yet not to the righteous only are such trials, for Belshazzar feasts in his palace in Babylon, but that same night was Belshazzar slain. An arrow pierces the heart of wicked Ahab, but gracious Josiah fell in the same manner; with impartial foot doth calamity come to the door of all kinds of men. As darts the hawk upon its prey, so does affliction fall upon the unsuspecting sons of Adam. As the earthquake on a sudden overthrows a city, so does adversity shake the estate of mortals.

Sudden trial comes in various forms. Sometimes it is the loss of property, as in the instance of Lot when the kings came and took him captive and all that he had: then was he utterly spoiled. The same thing has happened in ordinary commerce, as in the case of Jehoshaphat when he made ships to go to Tarshish and they were broken at Ezion-gaber. His letters were opened one morning and the merchant, who thought himself rich as a prince, found that he had become a bankrupt. These are but common things in days of panic and convulsion. Frequently the calamity comes in the form of the loss of one dear to us. So came it to the Shunammite, whose child had been such a comfort to her, but it fell on a day that he went into the field unto the reapers, and he said, "My head, my head," and very soon the little gift from heaven had left a childless mother to weep over his little lifeless form. So happened it to Jacob, who sent his darling son away with a kiss, but ere many hours had passed he saw his garment covered with blood, and exclaimed, "An evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." You cannot be sure of child, or wife, or husband. The fondest

er may be torn from your side, and the dearest babe may be rent from your bosom. Here below nothing is certain but universal uncertainty. In any way or another God knoweth how to bring the rod home to us, and to make us smart till we cry out, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment."

Now, this might well be expected. Do we wonder when we are suddenly deprived of our earthly comforts? Are they not fleeting things? When they came to us did we receive a lease of them, or were we promised that they should last for ever? Jonah sat under his withered gourd, ingesting his hands and complaining of God, but if you and I had been where we might have said "What aileth thee, man? Art thou surprised that thy gourds wither?" "I murmur," said he, "because I have lost the shade which screened me from the sun." "But, man, is it not the nature of a gourd to die? It came up in a night, dost thou marvel that it perished in a night? A worm at the root of a gourd surely is no novelty. A prophet, be not angry with thy God, this is what thou shouldst look for from such a growth." If our tents are spoiled, we should remember that they are tents, and not fortresses; curtains, and not bulwarks. The enemy can readily enough enter and spoil the habitation which is made of such frail material. Do you wonder that your offspring die? Why so? Across your children's brows there is written the word "mortal," if you would but admit it. Did you expect a mortal mother to bring forth an immortal child? Did you, a dying father, expect to be the parent of a daughter who should never see death? Your love is astonished, but your reason is not; your affection counts it strange, but your understanding judges it to be according to the frequent course of nature. Your children came to you, and you received them into your home and heart, with the knowledge that they were mortal, and therefore you are not deceived. Bow, therefore, to the divine will and say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

You lament that you have lost your riches. Are you surprised at that? Do you keep birds? Do you wonder when they fly away? What are these but birds of golden feather? They take to themselves wings, we are fond of them, and they fly away. It is not the most marvellous thing in the world if your boy has a tame bird if he comes to you and says, "Father, my bird has taken wings and fled away." "Dear child," say you, "I always wondered that it did not do so before." So may you say to the merchant who has lost his property in trading—the marvel is not that wealth departs but that it stays by any man, seeing it is the nature of winged things to fly away. Clouds dissolve, bubbles burst, snow-flakes melt, and even so do this world's treasures waste away.

Moreover, our earthly comforts were never given to us to be held for ever by a covenant of salt. They are always loans, and never gifts. All that we possess here below is God's property; he has only loaned it out to us, and what he lends he has a right to take back again. We hold our possessions and our friends, not upon freehold, but upon lease terminable at the Supreme Owner's option; do you wonder when the holding ceases? Do you know the parable of the wise Jewish woman? When her husband, a Rabbi, had gone out to teach his disciples, certain neighbours in great sorrow brought home to her the corpses of her only children, two sweet sons, who had been drowned. She took them upstairs, and laid them

upon the bed, and covered them with a sheet, and waited in her deep affliction till her husband came home, grieving most of all for the sorrow which would overwhelm him. She stood at the door and mournfully said, "My husband, dost thou know that a great tribulation has happened unto me? A friend had lent me a treasure, and, while I have had it, it has been a great joy to me, but this day he has taken it back again, and I know not what to do." "My beloved," said the Rabbi, "Speak not so. Can it be a sorrow to thee to return that which thou hast borrowed? O daughter of Abraham, thou canst not harbour dishonesty in thy soul. If the treasure hath been lent, be grateful to him who permitted thee the loan, and send it back with cheerfulness." "Sayest thou so?" said she; "Come hither." Then she turned back the coverlet, and he gazed upon the cold faces of his two children, and he said "Thou hast spoken wisely, O woman, for I understand that God hath lent these children unto me, and that I must not complain because he hath taken back his own." See ye not how natural it is that loans should be returned to their lender in due season. Say not, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath," as though thou wert the chief or the only sufferer, for in this thing there hath no trial happened unto you but such as is common to men." Cry not in dismay, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment!" for when war is raging it is little surprising that tents should be spoiled. It is according to the nature of things that in a world which bringeth forth thorns and briars in all its furrows some of the sharp points should pierce thy flesh.

Once more, we live in a world that is full of thieves, and it is no wonder if our joys are stolen. Our Master has warned us that our habitations here below are not thief-proof; he forbids us, therefore, to lay up our treasure where thieves break through and steal. The mud-houses of the East are very soon entered by burglars; they break a hole wherever they please, and steal a man's wealth while he sleeps, and this present life is of the same fashion. This world swarms with thieves such as false friends and deceivers, slanderers and cavillers, losses in business and crosses in our expectations, unkindness of enemies and fickleness of acquaintances, and especially sickness and death. We must not marvel, therefore, if some thief or other should take away the dear delight which makes our tent so happy.

Beloved, since these calamities may be expected, *let us be prepared for them.* "How?" say you. Why, by holding all earthly things loosely; by having them as though you had them not; by looking at them as fleeting, and never expecting them to abide with you. Love the creature in the measure in which the creature may be loved, and no more. Mortal things may only be loved in their proportion; never make them your gods, nor suffer your heart to live upon them or stay itself upon them, for if you do you are preparing sorrow for yourself, and "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" Thou wilt cry with Micah, "They have taken away my gods." If you suffer your heart to be filled with earthly things while you have them, you will have your heart broken when they are taken away.

Let us take care to make good use of our comforts while we possess them. Since they hastily fly by us, let us catch them on the wing, and

diligently employ them for God's glory. Let us be careful to place our chief treasure in heaven, for, as old Swinnock says, "A worldling's wealth lieth in the earth, therefore, like wares laid in low damp cellars, it corrupts and moulders; but the godly man's treasure is in heaven, and, like commodities laid up in high rooms, it continues sound and safe." Treasure in the skies is treasure indeed. Where moth and rust and thief can enter is no fit place for us to store our treasures in. Let us commit our all to the custody of God, who is our all in all. Such a blessed thing is faith in God that if the believer should lose everything he possesses here below he would have small cause for sorrow so long as he kept his faith. If a great landed proprietor in walking down the street were robbed of his handkerchief, he would not lie down in despair, nor even make a great noise over his loss. "Ah," says he, "they could only steal a mere trifle, they could not rob me of my parks and farms, and yearly incomings." Believers invest their true wealth in a bank which never breaks, and as for their earthly substance it is not theirs at all, but their Lord's, and they desire only to employ it for his cause; so that if he takes it away they are bound to look upon themselves as no losers, but as in some measure released from responsibility, and they may thank their Lord for such relief. Be sure thou use this world as not abusing it, and fix all thy joy and love and hope and trust in the eternal God, and then, happen what may, thou wilt be safe. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."

But let me solemnly remind you that *in times when we meet with sudden calamity God is putting us to the test*, and trying the love and faith of those who profess to be his people. "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" You thought you loved God: do you love him now? You said he was your Father, but that was when he kissed you; is he your Father now that he chastens you? The ungodly kick against God; they can only rejoice in him while he gives them sweet things, but his true children learn to kiss the rod. Can you believe in Jesus when distress is upon you, and when want assails you as an armed man? You talked of your faith in summer weather: have you faith now in the long, wintry nights? Can you trust the Lord when the fierce winds from the wilderness threaten to overturn your tent? Has the Holy Ghost given you the faith of God's elect, which can bear a strain? That faith which cannot endure trial is no faith at all, and if the death of a child, or the loss of wealth, or being smitten down by disappointment or sickness shall make thee doubt thy God, what wilt thou do when thou comest to die? If in running with footmen thou art wearied, what wilt thou do when thou contendest with horses? If these minor trials overwhelm thee, what wilt thou do in the last dread day, when all things pass away from thy sight? This is a trying time for your heart, a testing time for your graces. If all things be right within us, when our tents are spoiled we shall live closer to God than ever, and thus we shall be gainers by our loss, because it has increased our spirituality and our peace. It would be a blessed thing to be like the planet Venus, of which it is certain that the earth can never come between her and the sun. The world often hides our God from us, and when our comforts are swept away there is all the less likelihood of its doing so. If our bereavements bring us into

the clear and ever-abiding sunlight of the Lord's own face, we may be thankful to lose that which aforetime caused the eclipse.

"Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!
What though it be a cross
That raiseth me,
This still my cry shall be,
Nearer to thee, Nearer to thee!"

Blessed is he who is resolved with Job, and by grace is enabled to abide by it, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." We should learn to give up everything that is dear to us in this present life, and find our comfort in the hopes of the next world; so that, like David when his darling child had been taken away, we may say, "I shall go to him: he shall not return to me." Happy and blessed is the man who acteth thus. He shall not be cast down in the cloudy and dark day; "he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

Oh, you worldlings, what will you do in the time of trouble? How will you comfort your hearts in the day of visitation? Most of you young people are full of fun and mirth, and I am glad you have happy times; but the holidays of youth last not for ever, your tents will be spoiled one of these days, as surely as you live, and what will you then do? All the joy which you can draw from this world's wells will turn to brackish water ere long, and you will loathe it: what will you then do? Nothing will remain of all this momentary mirth when the heyday of your youth is over and the evil days come, and the days draw nigh when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them. Why, then, are you so taken up with fickle, fleeting joys? I beseech you seek substantial happiness. Ask for eternal blessings. Draw nigh to God by Jesus Christ and seek unfading bliss in his abiding love.

III. In the third place there may come A SUDDEN SPOILING OF LIFE ITSELF. In a moment prostrated by disease and brought to death's door, frail man may well cry out, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment!" *It is by no means unusual for men to die on a sudden.* One does not wish to suggest an unhappy thought, but this is so salutary a consideration that it ought never to be absent from us,—we are but dust, and may be dissolved in an instant by death. We are continually surprised that one and another have suddenly been called away; yet it is more strange that so many remain.

"Our life contains a thousand springs,
And fails if one be gone,
Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long."

In this large congregation death's work is very manifest to one who stands upon this central tower of observation. During the last few days we, as a church and congregation, have lost several from our midst. I will not point out the seats which are to-day occupied by others, where old friends have sat for many years, but so it is, that some have gone quite suddenly from us, and their graves are scarcely filled in. Who will be the next? It frequently happens that those who

re apparently very hale and strong men are among the first to fall. Our friends who are continual invalids remain with us, some of them many months, and even many years after we have sorrowfully given them up. Consumption keeps many for long months lingering slowly into everlasting life, while strong, hearty persons are in an instant taken away. It is therefore no new thing for men to die suddenly.

Not one man or woman here has a guarantee that he or she shall live till to-morrow. It is almost a misuse of language to talk about life insurance, for we cannot insure our lives; they must for ever remain uninsured as to their continuance here. If I could be a prophet this morning, and point out one and another and say, "That man will be dead before next Sunday," or "That woman will not live a week," I should feel I had a very painful duty to discharge; but is it not wise for us to reflect that it may happen to any one of us? There are no reasons by which we can prove that we shall escape the mighty hunter for another day. We are ready enough to think of this for others, for all men think all men mortal but themselves; but practical wisdom would lead us to suggest to ourselves that *we* are mortal, and that perhaps the death-bolt which has just left the bow of God may be aimed at our hearts. The question is, "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" When on a sudden the curtains of our tent shall rend in twain, and the tent pole shall be snapped, and the body shall lie a desolate ruin, what shall we then do? I will tell you what some of us know that we shall do. We know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. As poor, guilty sinners we have fled to Christ for refuge, and he is ours, and we know that he will surely keep what we have committed to him until that day: therefore are we not afraid of all that the spoilers can do. We are not afraid of thee, O Death, for thou art the porter that shall open the gates of immortality. And you, ye worms, we are not afraid of you; for though ye devour this body, yet ye shall not destroy it, for in our flesh shall we see God. O Grave, we are not dismayed at thy gloom, for what art thou but a refining pot, out of which this poor earthy body shall arise set free from all corruption. Time, we fear not thy trials! Eternity, we dread not thy terrors. Our soul shall dwell at ease, come what may. Glory be to the blessed name of the Lord Jesus we shall rise because he has risen, we shall live because he lives, and reign because he reigns.

We are not afraid of the spoiler; but O, worldling, when thou art spoiled, what wilt *thou* do? Rich man, your acres will be yours no longer; no park for you to roam over, no fine trees to boast of, nor ancestral halls in which to glorify yourselves. You will have nothing left you; no barns, no ripening harvests, no noble horses or fattened sheep: you must leave them all, and if these are your treasures, what will you do when God requires your soul of you? Then the largeness of the amount invested will only make it all the harder to die, and palaces and gardens will make the pang of separation yet more keen. You will find it a dreadful wrench to be torn away from that in which your heart so much delighted. "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" Thy money bags will not ease thy conscience: all the leases, and title deeds, and mortgages that thou canst heap upon thee will

not warm thy dying heart into the life of hope. What wilt thou do? Alas, what wilt thou do?

And you, ye worldlings, who have no wealth, but live for present pleasure,—where then will be your wine cups and your dances? Where your draughts of mighty ale, your oaths and blasphemies? Where now your midnight revelry and wantonness? When ye shall appear before the Judge of all the earth, what will be left to you? When all these unhallowed pleasures are swept away, what remains? Yes, thou lover of pleasure, make merry and rejoice to-day, but “when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?” With thy children about thee, rejoice in thy home and live at ease without God, but “when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?” Despise religion if thou wilt, and count it all a dream invented to make men sour and wretched, but when thou art dying, and thy pulse is faint and failing, what wilt thou do? What canst thou do? Opportunities over, and space for repentance nearly run out,—what wilt thou do? The thought mayhap will seize you then, “Too late, too late! you cannot enter now.” The voice which saith, “Behold the bridegroom cometh,” will startle you in the midnight of your ignorance just as you are about to die, and then you will wring your hands in everlasting despair, because you did not in due time seek him who can save you from the wrath to come. Awaken, I beseech you, your sluggish hearts, and look forward to your latter end. I pray that I may leave one or two solemn thoughts upon the minds of the careless; better still, I pray God the Holy Spirit to lead them now to believe on the Lord Jesus to the saving of their souls.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxi.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—73 (Part III.), 74, 196.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Jesus saith saith unto him, Thou hast said (or said so), nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."—Matthew xxvi. 64.

OUR Lord, before his enemies, was silent in his own defence, but he faithfully warned and boldly avowed the truth. His was the silence of patience, not of indifference; of courage, not of cowardice. It is written that "before Pontius Pilate he witnessed a good confession," and that statement may also be well applied to his utterances before Caiaphas, for there he was not silent when it came to confession of necessary truth. If you will read the chapter now open before us, you will notice that the high priest adjured him, saying, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of God?" to which he replied at once, "Thou hast said it." He did not disown his Messiahship; he claimed to be the promised one, the messenger from heaven, Christ the anointed of the Most High. Neither did he for a moment disavow his personal deity: he acknowledged and confessed that he was the Son of God. How could he be silent when such a vital point as to his person was in question? He did not hold them in suspense, but openly declared his Godhead by saying, "I am;" for so are his words reported by one of the evangelists. He then proceeded to reveal the solemn fact that he would soon sit at the right hand of God, even the Father. In the words of our text he declared that those who were condemning him would see him glorified, and in due time would stand at his bar when he would come upon the clouds of heaven to judge the quick and dead according to our gospel. See, then, dear brethren, in a few words, the great truths of our holy religion clearly set forth by our Lord Jesus: he claimed to be the Christ of God, and the Son of God, and his brief statement by implication speaks of Jesus dead, buried, and risen, and now enthroned at the right hand of God in the power of the Father, and Jesus soon to come in his glorious second advent to judge the world in righteousness. Our Lord's confession was very full, and happy is he who heartily embraces it.

Nos. 1,364-5.

I intend to dwell upon three catch-words around which there gathers a world of encouraging and solemn thought. The first is "*nevertheless*," and the second is "*hereafter*;" what the third is you shall know hereafter, but not just now.

I. "*NEVERTHELESS*," said Christ, "hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." This, then, is the string from which we must draw forth music. "*Nevertheless*," which being interpreted by being pulled in pieces, signifies that truth is never-the-less sure because of opposition. "*Nevertheless*," not one atom the less is the truth certain to prevail, for all that you say or do against it. Jesus will surely sit at the right hand of power, and come in due season upon the clouds of heaven. Let us dwell for a little time upon this important fact, that truth is none the less certain because of the opposition of men and devils.

Observe, first, that *the Saviour's condition when he made use of that "nevertheless" was no proof that he would not rise to power.* There he stood, a poor, defenceless, emaciated man, newly led from the night-watch in the garden and its bloody sweat. *He was a spectacle of meek and lowly suffering*, led by his captors like a lamb to the slaughter, with none to speak a word on his behalf. He was surrounded by those who hated him, and he was forsaken by his friends. Scribes, Pharisees, priests, were all thirsting for his heart's blood. A lamb in the midst of wolves is but a faint picture of Christ standing there before the Sanhedrim in patient silence. And yet, though his present condition seemed to contradict it, he who was the faithful and true witness spake truly when he testified, "*Nevertheless, hereafter ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.* Despite my present shame and suffering, so it shall be."

He gives himself that lowly, humble title of Son of man, as best indicating himself in his condition at that time. "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." The humiliation of Christ did not in the least endanger his after glory. His sufferings, his shame, his death, did not render it any the less certain that he would climb to his throne. Nor did the cavillings of his opposers keep him for one instant from his place of honour. I wish you to remember this, for there is a great principle in it. There are many poor weakminded people who cannot take sides with a persecuted truth, nor accept anything but the most popular and fashionable form of religion. They dare not be with truth when men spit in its face, and buffet it, and pour contempt upon it; but it will be victorious none the less, although cowards desert it and falsehearted men oppose it. If it stand alone at the bar of the world, a culprit to be condemned,—if it receive nothing but a universal hiss of human execration,—yet, if it be the truth, it may be condemned, but it will be justified; it may be buried, but it will rise; it may be rejected, but it will be glorified, even as it has happened to the Christ of God. Who would be ashamed of truth at any time when he knows the preciousness of it? Who will tremble because of present opposition when he foresees what will yet come of it? What a sublime spectacle—the man of sorrows standing before his cruel judges in all manner of weakness and poverty and contempt, at the same time heir of all things, and

appointed, nevertheless, to sit at the right hand of power and to come in the clouds of heaven.

Nor may we think only of his condition as a despised and rejected man; for he was, on his trial, charged with grievous wrong, and about to be *condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities*. The scribes learned in the law declared that he blasphemed: and the priests, familiar with the ordinances of God, exclaimed, "Away with him; it is not meet that he should live." The high priest himself gave judgment that it was expedient for him to be put to death. It is a very serious thing, is it not, when all the ecclesiastical authorities are against you,—when they are unanimous in your condemnation? Yes, verily, and it may cause great searching of heart; for no peaceable man desires to be opposed to constituted authority, but would sooner have the good word of those who sit in Moses' seat. But this was not the last time in which the established ecclesiastical authorities were wrong, grievously wrong. They were condemning the innocent, and blaspheming the Lord from heaven. Nor, I say, was this the last time in which the mitre and the gown have been upon the side of cruel wrong: yet this did not un-Christ our Saviour or rob him of his deity or his throne. On the same principle human history brings before us abundance of instances in which, nevertheless, though scribes, priests, bishops, pontiffs, and popes condemned the truth, it was just as sure, and became as triumphant, as it had a right to do. There stands the one lone man, and there are all the great ones around him—men of authority and reputation, sanctity and pomp—and they unanimously deny that he can ever sit at the right hand of God: "But, nevertheless," saith he, "hereafter ye shall see the Son of man at the right hand of power." He spoke the truth: his declaration has been most gloriously fulfilled hitherto. Even thus over the neck of clergy, priests, pontiffs, popes, his triumphant chariot of salvation shall still roll, and the truth—the simple truth of his glorious gospel—shall, despite them all, win the day, and reign over the sons of men.

Nor is this all. Our Lord at that time was *surrounded by those who were in possession of earthly power*. The priests had the ear of Pilate, and Pilate had the Roman legions at his back. Who could resist such a combination of force? Craft and authority form a dreadful league. One disciple drew a sword, but just at the time when our Lord stood before the Sanhedrim that one chivalrous warrior had denied him; so that all the physical force was on the other side. As a man he was helpless when he stood bound before the council. I am not speaking now of that almighty power which faith knows to have dwelt in him; but as to human power, he was weakness at its weakest. His cause seemed at the lowest ebb. He had none to stand up in his defence—nay, none to speak a word on his behalf; for, "Who shall declare his generation?" And yet, for all that, and even because of it, he did rise to sit at the right hand of power, and he shall come in the clouds of heaven. So if it ever comes to pass, my brother, that thou shouldst be the lone advocate of a forgotten truth,—if thy Master should ever put thee in all thy weakness and infirmity in the midst of the mighty and the strong, do not thou fear or tremble; for the possession of power is but a trifle compared with the possession of truth, and he that has the right may

safely defy the might of the world. He shall win and conquer, let the princes and powers that be take to themselves what force and craft they choose. Jesus, nevertheless, wins, though the power is all against him, and so shall the truth which he represents, for it wears about it a hidden power which baffles all opponents.

Nor was it merely all the power, there was a *great deal of furious rage against him*. That Caiaphas, how he spoke to him! "I adjure thee," saith he, "by God." And after he has spoken he rends his garments in indignation, his anger burns like fire; but the Christ is very quiet, the Lamb of God is still, and looking his adversary in the face, he says, "Nevertheless, hereafter thou shalt see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." He was strong, and therefore calm; confident, and therefore peaceful; fully assured, and therefore patient. He could wait, for he believed; and his prophecy was true, notwithstanding the high priest's rage. So if we meet with any man at any time who gnashes his teeth upon us, who foams in passion, who dips his pen into the bitterest gall to write down our holy faith, who is indefatigable in his violent efforts against the Christ of God,—what mattereth it? "Nevertheless, ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power." "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion," said Jehovah; and he declared the decree though the heathen raged and the people imagined a vain thing. Well may he smile at rage who is so sure of victory.

Yes, but it was not one person that raged merely. The people of Jerusalem, and the multitudes that had come up to the passover, bribed and egged on by the priests and the Pharisees, were all hot after our Saviour's death, clamouring, "Crucify him, crucify him;" and yet there he stood, and as he heard their tumult, and anticipated its growing demand for his blood, he lost not his confidence, but he calmly said, "Nevertheless, hereafter, shall ye see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power." Behold his perfect inward peace, and see how he manifests it by a bold confession in the very teeth of all his adversaries. "Ye may be as many as the waves of the sea; and ye may foam and rage like the ocean in a storm, but the purpose and the decree of God will, nevertheless, be fulfilled; ye cannot let or hinder it one whit. Ye, to your everlasting confusion, shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power."

Beloved, you know that after he had said this our Lord was taken before Herod and Pilate, and at last was put to death: and he knew all this, foreseeing it most clearly, and yet it did not make him hesitate. He knew that he would be crucified, and that his enemies would boast that there was an end of him and of his kingdom. He knew that his disciples would hide themselves in holes and corners, and that nobody would dare to say a word concerning the man of Nazareth: he foreknew that the name of the Nazarene would be bandied about amid general opprobrium, and Jerusalem would say, "That cause is crushed out: that egg of mischief has been broken;" but he, foreseeing all that, and more, declared, "Nevertheless, hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." I cannot help harping upon the text—I hope I shall not weary you with it, for to me it is music. I do not like running over the word "*nevertheless*"

too quickly, I like to draw it out and repeat it as "never—the—less." No, not one jot the less will his victory come. Not in the least degree was his royal power endangered or his sure triumph imperilled. Not even by his death and the consequent scattering of his disciples was the least hazard occasioned; but, indeed, all these things wrought together for the accomplishment of the divine purpose concerning him, and the lower he stooped the more sure he was to rise ultimately to his glory.

And now, beloved, it is even so. The man Christ Jesus was despised and rejected of men, but at this moment he sits at the right hand of power: all power is given to him in heaven and in earth, and therefore does he bid us proclaim his gospel. There is not an angel but does his bidding; providence is arranged by his will, for "the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Atoning work is done, and, therefore, he sits. His work is well done, and, therefore, he sits on the right hand of God, in the place of honour and dignity. Before long he will come. We cannot tell when: he may come to-night, or he may tarry many a weary year: but he will surely come in person, for did not the angels say to the men of Galilee, as they stood gazing into heaven, "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"? He shall come with blast of trumpet and with thousands of angelic beings, all doing him honour. He shall come with flaming fire to visit the trembling earth. He shall come with all his Father's glories on, and kings and princes shall stand before him, and he shall reign amongst his ancients gloriously. The tumults of the people, and the plotting of their rulers, shall be remembered in that day, but it shall be to their own eternal shame: his throne shall be none the less resplendent.

I beg you to learn the spiritual lesson which comes out of this. I have already indicated it, and it is this—never be afraid to stand by a losing cause. Never hesitate to stand alone when the truth is to be confessed. Never be overawed by sacerdotalism, or daunted by rage, or swayed by multitudes. Unpopular truth is, nevertheless, eternal, and that doctrine which is scouted and cast out as evil to-day shall bring immortal honour to the man who dares to stand by its side and share its humiliation. Oh, for the love of the Christ who thus threw a "*nevertheless*" at the feet of his foes, follow him whithersoever he goeth. Through flood or flame, in loneliness, in shame, in obloquy, in reproach, follow him! If it be without the camp, follow him! If every step shall cost you abuse and scorn, follow still; yea, to prison and to death still follow him, for as surely as he sitteth at the right hand of power so shall those who love him and have been faithful to his truth sit down upon his throne with him. His overcoming and enthronement are the pledges of the victory both of the truth and of those who courageously espouse it.

Thus have we sounded our first great bell—"NEVERTHELESS." Let its music ring through the place and charm each opened ear.

II. The second bell is "HEREAFTER." "*Nevertheless, hereafter.*" I like the sound of those two bells together: let us ring them again. "*Nevertheless, hereafter.*" The hereafter seems in brief to say to me that *the main glory of Christ lies in the future*. Not to-day, perhaps, nor to-morrow will the issue be seen! Have patience! Wait a while.

"Your strength is to sit still." God has great leisure, for he is the Eternal. Let us partake in his restfulness while we sing, "*Nevertheless, hereafter.*" O for the Holy Spirit's power at this moment; for it is written, "he will show you things to come."

It is one great reason why the unregenerate sons of men cannot see any glory in the kingdom of Christ because to them it is such a future thing. Its hopes look into eternity: its great rewards are beyond this present time and state, and the most of mortal eyes cannot see so far. Unregenerate men are like Passion in John Bunyan's parable: they will have all their good things now, and so they have their toys and break them, and they are gone, and then their hereafter is a dreary outlook of regret and woe. Men of faith know better; and like Patience in the same parable, they choose to have their best things last, for that which comes last, lasts on for ever. He whose turn comes last has none to follow him, and his good things shall never be taken away from him. The poor, purblind world cannot see beyond its own nose, and so it must have its joys and riches at once. To them speedy victory is the main thing, and the truth is nothing. Is the cause triumphant to-day? Off with your caps, and throw them up, and cry "Hurrah!" no matter that it is the cause of a lie. Do the multitudes incline that way? Then, sir, if you be worldly-wise, run with them. Pull off the palm branches, strew the roads, and shout "Hosanna to the hero of the hour!" though he be a despot or a deceiver. But not so—not so with those who are taught of God. They take eternity into their estimate, and they are contented to go with the despised and rejected of men for the present, because they recollect the hereafter. They can swim against the flood, for they know whither the course of this world is tending. O blind world, if thou wert wise, thou wouldst amend thy line of action, and begin to think of the hereafter too; for, brethren, the hereafter will soon be *here*. What a short time it is since Adam walked in the garden of Eden: compared with the ages of the rocks, compared with the history of the stars, compared with the life of God, it is as the winking of an eye, or as a flash of lightning. One has but to grow a little older, and years become shorter, and time appears to travel at a much faster rate than before, so that a year rushes by you like a meteor across the midnight heavens. When we are older still, and look down from the serene abodes above, I suppose that centuries and ages will be as moments to us; for to the Lord they are as nothing. Suppose the coming of the Lord should be put off for ten thousand years—it is but supposition—but if it were, ten thousand years will soon be gone, and when the august spectacle of Christ coming on the clouds of heaven shall really be seen, the delay will be as though but an hour had intervened. The space between now and then, or rather the space between what is "now" at this time, and what will be "now" at the last—how short a span it is! Men will look back from the eternal world and say, "How could we have thought so much of the fleeting life we have lived on earth, when it was to be followed by eternity? What fools we were to make such count of momentary, transient pleasures, when now the things which are not seen, and are eternal, have come upon us, and we are unprepared for them!" Christ will soon come, and at the longest, when he cometh,

he interval between to-day and then will seem to be just nothing at all ; so that "hereafter" is not as the sound of far-off cannon, nor as the boom of distant thunder, but it is the rolling of rushing wheels hastening to overtake us.

"Hereafter!" "Hereafter!" Oh, when that hereafter comes, how overwhelming it will be to Jesus' foes! Now where is Caiaphas? Will he now adjure the Lord to speak? Now, ye priests, lift up your haughty heads! Utter a sentence against him now! There sits, your victim upon the clouds of heaven. Say now that he blasphemes, and hold up your rent rags, and condemn him again. But where is Caiaphas? He hides his guilty head: he is utterly confounded, and begs the mountains to fall upon him. And, oh, ye men of the Sanhedrim, who sat at midnight and glared on your innocent victim, with your cold, cruel eyes, and afterwards gloated over the death of your martyred Prince, where are ye now—now that he has come with all his Father's power to judge you? They are asking the hills to open their caverns and conceal them: the rocks deny them shelter. And where, on that day, will you be; you who deny his deity, who profane his Sabbath, who slander his people, and denounce his gospel—oh, where will you be in that tremendous day, which as surely comes as comes to-morrow's rising sun? Oh, sirs, consider this word—"Hereafter!" I would fain whisper it in the ear of the sinner, fascinated by his pleasures. Come near and let me do so—*hereafter!* I would make it the alarm of the bed-head of the sleeping transgressor, who is dreaming of peace and safety, while he is slumbering himself into hell. Hereafter! Hereafter! Oh, yes, ye may suck the sweet, and eat the fat, and drink as ye will; but hereafter! hereafter! What will ye do hereafter when that which is sweet in the mouth shall be as gall in the belly, and when the pleasures of to-day shall be a mixture of misery for eternity? Hereafter! Oh, hereafter! Now, O Spirit divine, be pleased to open careless ears, that they may listen to this prophetic sound.

To the Lord's own people there is no sound more sweet than that of "hereafter." "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." Welcome, welcome, welcome, Redeemer, Saviour! Welcome in every character in which thou comest. What acclamations and congratulations will go up from the countless myriads of his redeemed, when first the ensigns of the Son of man shall be seen in the heavens! On some one of earth's mornings, when the children of men shall be "marrying and giving in marriage," while saints shall be looking for his appearing, they shall first of all perceive that he is actually coming. Long desired, and come at last. Then the trumpet shall be heard, waxing exceeding loud and long, ringing out a sweeter note to the true Israel than ever trumpet heard on the morn of Jubilee. What delight! What lifting up of gladsome eyes! What floods of bliss! Oppression is over, the idols are broken, the reign of sin is ended, darkness shall no more cover the nations. He cometh, he cometh: glory be to his name!

"Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him Lord of all."

O blessed day of acclamations! how shall heaven's vault be rent with them when his saints shall see for themselves what was reserved for him and for them in the "hereafter." "Ye shall see the Son of man at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

That word "hereafter," my brothers and sisters, is, at this moment, our grandest solace, and I wish to bring it before you in that light. Have you been misunderstood, misrepresented, slandered because of fidelity to the right and to the true? Do not trouble yourself. Vindicate not your own cause. Refer it to the King's Bench above, and say, "Hereafter, hereafter." Have you been accused of being mad, fanatical, and I know not what besides, because to you party is nothing, and ecclesiastical pride nothing, and the stamp of popular opinion nothing; because you are determined to follow the steps of your Master, and believe the true and do the right? Then be in no hurry; the sure hereafter will settle the debate. Or are you very poor, and very sick, and very sad? But are you Christ's own? Do you trust him? Do you live in fellowship with him? Then the hope of the hereafter may well take the sting out of the present. It is not for long that you shall suffer; the glory will soon be revealed in you and around you. There are streets of gold symbolic of your future wealth, and there are harps celestial emblematical of your eternal joy. You shall have a white robe soon, and the dusty garments of toil shall be laid aside for ever. You shall have a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory; and therefore the light affliction which is but for a moment may well be endured with patience. Have you laboured in vain? Have you tried to bring souls to Christ, and had no recompense? Fret not, but remember the hereafter. Many a labourer, unsuccessful to the eye of man, will receive a "Well done, good and faithful servant" from his Master in that day. Set little store by anything you have, and wish but lightly for anything that you have not. Let the present be to you, as it really is, a dream, an empty show, and project your soul into the hereafter, which is solid and enduring; for, oh! what music there is in it!—what delight to a true child of God! "Nevertheless, hereafter."

I feel half inclined to have done, and to send you out of the place, singing all the way, "Nevertheless, hereafter." The people outside might not understand you, but it would be a perfectly justifiable enthusiasm of delight.

III. Now, thirdly. Where am I to look for my third bell? Where is the third word I spoke of? In truth, I cannot find it in the version which we commonly use, and there is no third word in the original, and yet the word I am thinking of is there. The truth is that the second word, which has been rendered by "hereafter," bears another meaning; I will give you what the Greek critics say, as nearly as can be, the meaning of the word is, "HENCEFORWARD." "Henceforward ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." "*Henceforward.*" That is another word, and the teaching gathered out of it is this: *even in the present there are tokens of the victory of Christ.* "But," says one, "did Christ say to those priests that henceforward they should see him sitting at the right hand of power?" Yes, yes, that is what he meant. He meant,

You look at me and scorn me ; but, sirs, you shall not be able to do is any longer, for henceforward you shall see for yourselves that I am what I appear to be, but that I sit at the right hand of power. Henceforward, and as long as you live, you shall know that galling truth." And did that come true? Yes, it came true that night ; for when the Saviour died there came a messenger unto the members of the Sanhedrim and others, and told them that the veil of the temple was rent in twain. In that moment, when the man of Nazareth died, that splendid piece of tapestry seemed to tear itself asunder from end to end as if in horror at the death of its Lord. The members of that council, when they met each other in the street and spoke of the news, must have been dumb in sheer astonishment ; but while they looked upon each other the earth they stood upon reeled and reeled again, and they could scarcely keep their feet. This was not the first wonder which had that day startled them, for the sun had been beclouded in unnatural darkness. At midday the sun had ceased to shine, and now the earth ceases to be stable. Lo, also, in the darkness of the evening, certain members of this council saw the sheeted dead, newly arisen from their sepulchres, walking through the streets ; for the rocks rent, the earth shook, and the graves opened, and the dead came forth and appeared unto many. Thus early they began to know that the man of Nazareth was at the right hand of power.

Early on the third morning, when they were met together, there came a messenger in hot haste, who said, "The stone is rolled away from the door of the sepulchre. Remember that ye placed a watch, and that ye set your seal upon the stone. But early this morning the soldiers say that he came forth. He rose, that dreaded One whom we put to death, and at the sight of him the keepers did quake and became as dead men." Now, these men—these members of the Sanhedrim—believed that fact ; and we have clear evidence that they did so, for they rebuked the soldiers, and said, "Say ye, his disciples came and stole away his body while we slept." Then did the word also continue to be fulfilled, and they plainly saw that Jesus whom they had condemned was at the right hand of power. A few weeks passed over their heads, and, lo, there was a noise in the city, and an extraordinary excitement. Peter had been preaching and three thousand persons in one day had been baptized into the name which they dreaded so much ; and they were told, and they heard it on the best of evidence, that there had been a wonderful manifestation of the Holy Spirit, such as was spoken of in the book of the prophet Joel. Then they must have looked one another in the face, and stroked their beards, and bitten their lips, and said one to another, "Did he not say that we should see him at the right hand of power?" They had often to remember that word, and gain and again to see its truth, for when Peter and John were brought before them, it was proven that they had restored a lame man, and these two unlearned and ignorant men told them that it was through the name of Jesus that the lame were made to leap and walk. Day after day they were continuously obliged, against their will, to see, in the spread of the religion of the man whom they had put to death, that his name had power about it such as they could not possibly gainsay resist. Lo, one of their number, Paul, had been converted, and was

preaching the faith which he had endeavoured to destroy. They must have been much amazed and chagrined, as in this also they discerned that the Son of man was at the right hand of power.

Yes, say you, but did they see him coming in the clouds of heaven? I answer, yes. Henceforth they saw that also, for they began to have upon their minds forebodings, and dark thoughts. The Jewish nation was in an ill state, the people were getting disquieted, imposters were rising, and the leading men of the nation trembled as to what the Romans would do. At last there came an outbreak, and the imperial power was defied, and then such of them as still survived began to realize the words of Christ. When they saw the comet in the sky, and the drawn sword hanging over Jerusalem, when they saw the city compassed about with armies, when they marked the legions dig the trenches, and throw up the earthworks and surround the devoted city, while all around was fire and famine; when from every tower upon the walls they could see one of their own countrymen nailed to a cross, for the Romans put the Jews to death by crucifixion by hundreds, and even by thousands,—then must they have begun to see the coming of the Son of man. And when, at last, the city was destroyed and a fire-brand was hurled even into the holy place, and the Jews were banished and sold for slaves till they would not fetch the price of a pair of shoes, so many were they and so greatly despised,—then they saw the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven to take vengeance on his adversaries.

Read the text as meaning, "Henceforward, ye shall see the Son of man at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." It is not the full meaning of the passage, but it is a part of that meaning, beyond all question.

Beloved, even at the present time we may see the tokens of the power of Christ among us. Only tokens, mark you; I do not want to take you off from the hereafter, but henceforward and even now there are tokens of the power of our Lord Jesus. Look at revivals. When they break out in the church how they stagger all the adversaries of Christ. They said—yes, they dared to say—that the gospel had lost all its power—that, since the days of Whitefield and Wesley, there was no hope of the masses being stirred, yet when they see, even in this house, from Sabbath to Sabbath, vast crowds listening to the word, and when some few months ago no house could be built that was large enough to accommodate the thronging masses who sought to hear our American brethren, then were they smitten in the mouth, so that they could speak no more, for it was manifested that the Lord Christ still lives, and that, if his gospel be fully and simply preached, it will still draw all men to him, and souls will be saved, and that not a few.

And look ye, in the brave world outside, apart from religion, what influences there are abroad which are due to the power of the Christ of God. Would you have believed it twenty years ago that in America there should be no more a slave; that united Italy should be free of her despots? Could you have believed that the Pope would be pining about his being a prisoner in the Vatican, and that the power of anti-christ would be shorn away? No, the wonders of history, even within the last few years, are enough to show us that Christ is at the right

hand of power. Come what will in the future, mark ye this, my brethren, it will never be possible to uphold tyranny and oppression long, for the Lord Christ is to the front for the poor and needy of the earth. O despots, you may do what you will, and use your craft and policy, if you please, but all over this world the Lord Jesus Christ has lifted up a plummet and set up a righteous standard, and he will draw a straight line, and it will pass through everything that offends, that it may be cut off; and it will also pass over all that is good and lovely, and right, and just, and true, and these shall be established in his reign among men. I believe in the reign of Christ. Kings, sultans, czars—these are puppets all of them, and your parliaments and congresses are but vanity of vanity. God is great, and none but he. Jesus is the King in all the earth. He is the man, the King of men, the Lord of all. Glory be to his name. As the years progress we shall see it more and more, for he has had long patience, but he is beginning now to cut the work short in righteousness. He is baring his right arm for war and that which denies manhood's just claims, that which treads upon the neck of the humanity which Christ has taken, that which stands against his throne and dominion, must be broken in pieces like a potter's vessel, for the sceptre in his hand is a rod of iron, and he will use it mightily. The Christ, then, gives tokens still of his power. They are only tokens, but they are sure ones, even as the dawn does not deceive us, though it be not the noontide.

And oh, let me say, there be some of you present who are enemies of Christ, but you also must have perceived some tokens of his power. I have seen him shake the infidel by the gospel till he has said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." He has taken him in the silence of the night and probed his conscience: in his gentleness and love, and pity he has led the man to think, and though he has not altogether yielded, yet he has felt that there is a solemn power about the Christ of God. Some of the worst of men have been forced to own that Christ has conquered them. Remember how Julian, as he died, said, "The Nazarene has overcome me: the Nazarene has overcome me." May you not have to say that in the article of death, but oh that you may say it now. May his love overpower you, may his compassion win you, and you will see in your own salvation tokens of his power.

But I must have done, for my time has fled, but I desire to add that it will be a blessed thing if everyone here, becoming a believer in Jesus, shall henceforward see him at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. Would to God we could live with that vision full in view, believing Jesus to be at the right hand of power, trusting him and resting in him. Because we know him to be the Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle, we ought never to have a doubt when we are doing what is right. We ought never to have a doubt when we are following Jesus, for he is more than a conqueror, and so shall his followers be. Let us go on courageously, trusting in him as a child trusts in his father, for he is mighty upon whom we repose our confidence.

Let us also keep before our mind's eye the fact that he is coming. Be ye not as the virgins that fell asleep. Even now my ear seems to hear the midnight cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" Arise, ye

virgins, sleep no longer, for the bridegroom is near. As for you, ye foolish virgins, God grant that there may yet be time enough left to awake even you, that you may yet have oil for your lamps before he comes. He comes we know not when, but he comes quickly. Be ye ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Be ye as men that watch for their Lord, and as servants that are ready to give in their account, because the master of the house is near.

In that spirit let us come to the Lord's table, as often as we gather there, for he has said to us, "Do this until I come." Outward ordinances will cease when he comes, for we shall need no memorial when the Lord himself will be among us. Let us here pledge him in the cup. That he is coming we do verily believe; that he is coming we do joyfully proclaim. Is it a subject of joy to you? If not—

"Ye sinners seek his face,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Bow to the sceptre of his grace,
And find salvation there."

God bless you for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matt. xxvi. 47—75.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—414, 746.

MR. SPURGEON begs to remind his readers that the various religious and charitable institutions which he conducts require nearly £300 per week to sustain them, and though there is no list of regular subscribers, and no collector has ever been paid, yet the need has been met for many years by the freewill offering of the Lord's people. During the summer months the donations are usually very few; perhaps readers of the sermons will think of this. Full information as to each work will be found in a shilling volume, entitled, "The Metropolitan Tabernacle: its History and Work," published by Passmore and Alabaster, 4, Paternoster Buildings. It is a profusely illustrated book, and full of interest.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TREES IN GOD'S COURTS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."—Psalm xcii. 13—15.

THESE verses occur at the close of a psalm for the Sabbath over which there rests a sabbatic glory of perfect calm, of hallowed peace. Amidst the business and bustle of daily life the great trouble of the psalmist was the prosperity of the wicked, but it does not trouble him at all when he enters the sanctuary, there to keep the holy day. He then looks upon the ungodly who prosper in the world as so much flowering grass in their beauty, and he beholds them cut down and utterly destroyed. And it is meet that a psalm for the Sabbath should be calm and peaceful, cloudless and far-seeing. If on any day we see things in their right light, and our views extend farther than at other times, surely it should be on the day of sacred rest. I know a friend who wished to take a house in Newcastle. It stood on an elevated position, and the landlord, who wished to have him for a tenant, took him to the attic of the house, and said, "What a view there is from this window! Do you know," said he, "that on Sundays you can see Durham Cathedral?" "On Sundays!" said my friend, with a look of surprise, "and why not on other days?" "Well," said the landlord, "on Sundays there is less smoke, and so you can see farther." And, as it is in the natural world, so it should always be in the spiritual—less of the smoke of this world—less of the dust and the care of life, and therefore a clearer vision of the things which are beyond, which God reveals to spiritual eyes. Read and sing this psalm often, and may your heart constantly be in that sweet restful state.

David having here put aside this trouble which he so often brings up in the psalms—the frequent prosperity of the wicked, as they exult

in power and spread themselves like a green bay tree, whilst the righteous are plagued all the day long and chastened every morning—after putting that aside, he dwells upon the delightful condition of the man of God, and he describes him as a tree that is planted in the courts of God's house, growing, flourishing, and bearing fruit even in old age. It is of such we are now going to speak, and we shall call your attention to *the planting of the trees, the promise that they shall flourish, the continued fertility they exhibit, and the conclusive proof they show of God's faithfulness.* "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God."

I. THE PLANTING. It sounds oddly to you to hear of planting a tree in a house, and of its flourishing in courts; but you will please to remember that an oriental house is a sort of quadrangle. It is a four-square building, with the middle open to the sky, and generally there is a small garden, in which a palm tree, or an olive, or some other evergreen tree (for they generally prefer that sort) will be found planted: so that what seems strange to us—a tree planted in a house—was not at all strange to David or to anybody else who lived in the city of Jerusalem. And it is a very beautiful figure—this being planted within the four courts of God's house, that we might grow right in the middle of the place where God with his family deigns to dwell.

What, then, is it to be planted? Well, we are planted in God's house in two respects. First, *in regeneration*, when we are born into the house; and secondly, *at our profession of faith*, which should be by baptism, when we are publicly brought into the house and planted in the likeness of Christ's death by being buried, after his commandment, in the water.

We are really planted in the courts of the Lord's house *by the new birth*. Then we become the children of God, for "as many as received him (that is to say, him who is the Divine Word, the true Light, the Saviour), to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Every man, the world over, that has been born of the Holy Spirit, is really planted in the Lord's house. But we become manifestly and visibly so on confessing to the world this inward and spiritual grace, for the Lord has thus put it, you know, "He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession, shall be saved," so that when I come to join God's people, and ask to be admitted to their fellowship,—when I come to the Lord's table with them, and publicly own myself to be one of the Master's servants—then I am in a public manner planted in the house of the Lord.

Well, this being the fact, let us follow the figure a little more closely.

Planting implies, first, that *there has been something done for us that that we could not do for ourselves.* A tree cannot plant itself. There are self-sown trees, but such are not spoken of in the text. It is "those that be *planted* in the house of the Lord." And you know, there is a necessity that there should be a work of grace upon our souls, which shall come, not from ourselves, but distinctly from God,

for "every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." It cannot plant itself, and, if it could, it must be rooted up, because it would not be planted by the heavenly Father. There must be wrought upon us, in order to our being truly in the courts of the Lord's house, a work of grace infinitely beyond the power of the will, or all the power that dwells in human nature. We must, in fact, be new-created. We must be born again. We must have as great a work wrought upon us as was wrought upon the body of Christ when he was raised from the dead. The eternal power and godhead of the divine Spirit must put forth the fulness of its strength to raise you up from your death in sin, or otherwise you will be like scar branches and cast off pieces of wood, but never will you be trees planted, made to live and to grow in the courts of the Lord's house. There must be something done for us, if we are planted.

That implies, too, that there must be *a great change in our position*, for a tree that is planted has been growing somewhere else. It has to reach a certain height in the nurseryman's garden, if we are speaking of England, and then it is planted where it is meant to be permanently fixed. So must it have been in the East. The tree grew somewhere else. After a time it was dug up, its roots were loosened, it was taken away from the place where it had been accustomed to stand. Many a tender rootlet was made to bleed, and it was then carried and put in another place altogether, and so, from being outside the court it came to be inside the court of the house of the Lord. So, brethren and sisters, if we are to answer the condition described in the text we must have been dug up and transplanted. This is to have undergone a great and wonderful change. Are we conscious of it? Do we know ourselves to be new creatures in Christ Jesus? If you are what you always were, you are what I pray you may not always be; but if you are new, changed, transformed, or, to come back to the text, transplanted, then I trust you may continue to thrive according to the promise, "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God."

Ah me! that transplanting business is often very painful, and while it is being undergone we almost think that we are going to be destroyed. What anxiety it causes; for how is the plant to know what it is being taken up by the roots for? Perhaps it fancies—or rather if it had any intellect it would fancy—that it was taken up to be destroyed; just as when the law put a big spade down to our roots, and began to loosen all our soil about us, we thought, "Now we are going to be cut down." But we were not; we were going to be transplanted from the field of nature into the garden of grace. Blessed be God, we know what this means.

Planting means not only that something has been done for us that we could not do for ourselves, and that a great change has taken place in our position, but it implies that *there is life in us*. I suppose that if we speak of planting a post or planting a pillar we hardly use correct language. We plant a thing that has life in it, and we do not consider that a thing has been planted unless it be a living thing. Most certainly the promise of the text could not be fulfilled to any but a living tree, for it is said—"They that be planted shall flourish and they shall

bring forth fruit." God does not intend to have dead stumps standing in his court.

"That little garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground,
That little spot enclosed by grace
Out of the world's wild wilderness,"

is not intended to be occupied by dead trees. If there be such in it he will come and say, "Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?" It is a living tree that he desires to have there. Beloved, are you conscious of an inner life? Does there beat within you another pulse besides that which betokens natural life, the pulse of strong desire and love to God? Is there within you the heaving of another breath than that which keeps body and soul together? Is there the breath of prayer that keeps the soul and God together, and so keeps the man in spiritual life? Are you quickened? Have you had breathed into your nostrils the breath of the life of God? Is there within you the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever?—God's people are a living people, and if we do not know the life of God we know not God at all. There must be a life in us.

And then, to complete the figure, it seems to me that the fact of our being planted implies that *we ourselves have taken hold of the soil wherein we have been placed*. A tree that is rightly planted, so as to flourish, begins to send out its roots—to drink in moisture, to select from the earth around it those portions which are fit food for vegetable life.

Now, beloved, are you so incorporated with the church of God that you have got a grip of the fellowship of the saints, that you have effectually laid hold of the citizenship of our Lord's faithful disciples? Are you seeking for vital truth to sustain your soul's vitality? Do you in the ordinances send out the rootlets of your desire, to seek after what God has prepared for you? Is there in you a living sap flowing, which sap is being fed by what you draw in from the soil in which God has placed you? Surely you know what this means. Sabbath days are often feeding times to you; and your visits to the Lord in prayer are building up times to your spirit; and when you search the word in private, and when the Holy Ghost communes with you in your quiet retirement—ay, and when, even in the midst of business, your soul breathes her swift ejaculations up to heaven, then are the roots of your soul taking hold of Christ, and drawing out of him the vital element which you need. You are of the right kind if this be the case, and you shall flourish in the courts of our God.

You see, then, the figure, and what is meant by this planting in the house of the Lord.

II. Now, secondly, LET US ENDEAVOUR TO GRASP THE PROMISE. "Those that be planted shall flourish." "*Flourish*" they well may. Let us be sure of their welfare.

They shall flourish *because God has said that they shall*. His promises are sure to be fulfilled. If he plants a tree he will cause it to flourish. There seems to be very much against the Christian, many perils to which he is exposed, when he is first planted. Indeed, in the early childhood of Christian life we undergo a world of trial. Such was our weakness, and such our exposure to the bleak atmosphere of this

resent evil world, the chances were all against us. But there is no chance with God. What he plants is sure to take root. If he says it shall flourish, flourish it will. Satan may seek to tear it up; the foxes may try to spoil the vines; there may be chilling winds; there may be long droughts; the sun may seek to smite it by day, and the moon by night; but God hath promised that it shall flourish, and flourish it must; therefore I invite you, young Christians, to be very hopeful. See to it that you are rightly planted, and then you may depend upon that you will really flourish. God who hath been pleased to give you grace will bestow on you more grace, and then more grace—grace upon grace—grace for every exigence and every emergency. As your needs arise those needs shall be supplied. Just as you require spiritual health, spiritual health shall be vouchsafed to you if you seek it at his hands, knowing that it is at his disposal. You shall not be a half-starved Christian—a sort of living skeleton of a believer, but you shall flourish; you shall be peaceful, happy, strong, useful. Set your heart upon this, and ask the Lord to make you thrive, and bloom, and fructify. Your leaf shall not wither, and he will cause you to prosper if you are planted in the courts of the Lord.

Some of you, perhaps, are Christian men who have received the Word with gladness and believed to the saving of your souls, and so far you appear to be in the courts of God's house, but you have never joined the church, or made a profession of your faith, which, though it may be very sincere, is not very apparent. As, however, you have not gone in for the whole of the planting, you cannot reasonably expect to realize the whole of the flourishing. I like to know that I have given myself wholly up to the Lord according to his command; not having merely embraced one part of the gospel, but the whole of it. When one has sought to obey it in its entirety, then he may come and expect to have the promise in its entirety too. If you are altogether Christians, planted in his house—not merely in his garden, but in his house—then you shall flourish, for you have the promise that you shall. And flourish you well may, because of *the goodness of the soil*. They are quite sure to have good soil in the little garden enclosed by the house. It may be rocky outside, but when a man has built the four walls of his house in the East, he generally takes all the soil that is in the middle away. It may be very bad and poor, but then he has brought in baskets the richest soil that he can possibly get, for he must have a good tree in the middle of his house. It would not do every moment of the day to look out, or rather to look in, and to see a little scrubby tree, half alive. No, he procures the best soil he can get, and those that are planted in the house of the Lord are planted in the best soil possible. They are planted where the means of grace abound. They are planted where Christians help one another with mutual fellowship. They are planted where the ordinances of the gospel are freely enjoyed by all who dwell there. They are planted where the Holy Spirit has promised to abide. They are planted where the word of God does not return void. They are planted where the eye and the heart of Christ perpetually rest. They are planted in his church—the church that he hath redeemed with his most precious blood. The soil is good, and they ought to flourish, and they shall.

And then they are planted in a *sheltered position*. You know that trees, even if they have good soil, are sometimes a great deal kept back by having a cold northerly aspect. They may be very much bitten by the frost, but a tree that is planted right in the middle of the fore-court, surrounded by the walls, is sheltered. There is the natural warmth of the house round about it, and it is sheltered from that which other trees out in the vineyard, or out in the garden, may have to endure. Oh, how sheltered some of us have been from our first profession of faith. I know that I can speak to some here who began Christian life in a class in the Sunday-school, where a loving teacher looked after their spiritual interests. There are others of you that began your Christian life in the midst of a warm-hearted, earnest church. You were no sooner seen as a member than two or three friends took hold of you, and they did all they could to encourage you, guide you, and sympathize with you. Whenever they may have observed a little lukewarmness or backsliding in your manner, they have looked after you as a mother anxious for her child, so tenderly have you been nursed by those who watched for your souls. And you cannot surely forget how, on Sabbath days, the word of God has been a wonderful shelter to you. When your feet had almost gone there has been the very word to hold you up. When you felt dispirited there has been a promise to encourage you. When you have been ready to turn back there has been an exhortation that has stimulated you once more to go forward; and so you have lived inside four walls. The cold could not get at you. You scarcely had enough of the cold of the world to do you any injury. The warm sun of righteousness was reflected upon you, not only did it come directly upon you by divine favour, but it was reflected upon you with grateful sympathy by the walls of the house of the Lord in which you had been planted. You know it has been so. Is it any wonder then that you flourish? There is a little wonder sometimes that you do not flourish more, and that you do not bring forth more fruit; for what more could God do than he has done for some of you who have been planted in the house of the Lord? Are you not like a vineyard on a very fruitful hill, which he has hedged about and walled, and in which he has put a wine-press, and which he has watered every morning, and, lest any should hurt it, has kept night and day? How sour the grapes, and how few the clusters fit for the Great Vine-dresser to gather no one knows better than yourselves: Yet they ought to flourish, because they are planted in good soil, and because they are placed in a sheltered position.

Still we might assign a better reason why they should flourish. It is *because they are so near the husbandman*. "My Father is the husbandman," says Christ. They that be planted in the house of the Lord are planted in the husbandman's house.

Methinks I hear some one say "I do not wonder that such a vine flourishes, because, you see, the Great Vine-dresser, who understands all about it, has it on the wall of his own house. He sees it every morning, and of course he pays very special attention to it." Little do you and I know, beloved, what special attention God has paid to us personally and individually. Oh, there be some of us upon whom the Lord has been long wont to look with a tender but jealous eye. If he has seen a little wrong about us he has grieved at it, and felt, "I must put it

ray." When he has seen us getting a little cold he has begun at once rouse us up, for he has loved us too well to leave us exposed to even little spiritual sickness. He has said sometimes, "There is my servant, and he will get proud of his service, or of his success, I must bring him down." High looks and haughty thoughts are an abomination in his sight. Another time he has said, "Such-and-such a man is increasing in wealth; he will get worldly-minded. I must take away some of his worldly goods that he may take more account of his treasures hid up in heaven, and set his heart more on me." The Lord thy God is jealous God. Where there is love there is oftentimes a sensitiveness which stirs up jealousy. The greatness of God's love makes him very jealous for us and very jealous of us. If he sees those whom he very much loves, with the slightest evil thing about them, he is quick to observe it and prompt to purge it away. You know that you do not like to see a spot on your dear child's face. You will have it washed off as soon as possible. So will the Lord cleanse his people, both without and within. The care and the trouble he has had with us, as I have already said, none of us can tell. We ought to bring forth fruit, to the profit of our husbandman, to the glory of God. Branches that bring forth fruit he purges. Those that bring forth very little fruit he lets very much alone. If there be a man that brings forth much fruit, that man will have much trial, because it will pay the vine-dresser to prune him. Some branches will not pay for it. They will never do more than they are doing, and so there they are, and thus they are left to prove their weakness; but those that will pay for pruning will be pruned again and again. And, truly, when the man of God is in his right mind, he will bless the Lord for the honour he puts upon him when he afflicts him with the view of making him still more useful. This is evermore our Lord's design. Does he not say that they shall never perish whom he protects and provides for, holding them in his hands? But, as they cannot flourish if they run to wood, he will be quite sure to use his knife to take off this new shoot and that new shoot, because it is not fruit-bearing wood, and he takes it away, and he leaves the vine in such a condition that it will bring forth good fruit in due time. They shall flourish, and well they may, when they are so near to the Great Husbandman's hand.

Now, if any of you are not flourishing, though you are planted in the house of the Lord, I am sure it is not through any faultiness on God's part. Let such ask him, and ask themselves, the reason why, and go to him in prayer, and say—"Good Lord, I am planted in thy house: make me to flourish according to thy word."

III. Well, now, as to THE CONTINUANCE OF THIS FLOURISHING, our third head is full of consolation. "They shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing."

There are some that begin with a spurt, and it is soon over; and here are some trees that promise exceedingly well for fruit, but the blossoms did not knit, hence they fail to yield fruit in due season. But those whom God plants, and whom he makes to flourish, bring forth fruit, and continue to bring it forth till old age. During all their youth and all their manhood they keep fruitful, and then they bring forth fruit when their years decline and their days are numbered.

When others are in the sear and yellow leaf, then are their fruits ripe and mellow. When others are decaying they are ripening. They are growing sweeter, better, holier, when others are not growing at all. They shall bring forth fruit in old age—that time when one does not expect much fruit bearing—when the strength faileth, when the capacity for projecting seems to have gone, and the power for carrying out what is projected has become very little. “They shall bring forth fruit in old age.” This is not merely a cheering promise, but it is a very gratifying fact that God’s people do bring forth fruit in old age. Very luscious fruit some of them produce. Yea, we look for the best fruit in the oldest saints. What fruit, then, you will ask, do they bring forth?

Well, there is the fruit of *testimony*. I distinctly recollect hearing a blind old minister talk of the lovingkindness of the Lord when I was sixteen or seventeen, and the encouragement that he gave me has never departed from me. A young man could not have done that, because he had not attained so much experience; but the weight of years, and even of infirmities, made that venerable blind man’s testimony very, very weighty to my soul. “They shall bring forth fruit in old age.” Blessed be his name, I can tell of the goodness of the Lord to me these five-and-twenty years or more, since I have known him; but think of a man who can speak of fifty years, and there are some children of God who can do so. There is a member of this church who has been a member of it for seventy years, and she can tell you how good the Lord has been to her. And the fruit is riper, you know. There is a cumulative force of evidence, because if a thing has been true fifty years, and a person has tried it in all sorts and shapes and ways and modes and conditions and circumstances fifty years—well, who is to contradict that? It must be so, and you feel the testimony is a blessed fruit of old age.

Saints bring forth fruit in the way of *savour* when they grow old. Many young ministers can rattle out some of the truths of the gospel very readily; but if you want to taste the sweetness, to feel the unction, to enjoy the savour, you must hear one that has had long and deep experience. It must be so. There is an inimitable mellowness about the Christian who has grown old in his Master’s service. If you want to hear about the sea, talk to an “old salt.” If you want to hear about war, talk to an old soldier that has been in the battle and smelt gunpowder, and knows what it is to have lost a leg. He is the man to tell you. And so, if you want to know about the real deeps, the truth, the vitality, the power of religion, you must not go to boys: you must go to those who bring forth fruit in old age, because they can speak out of the fulness of their soul. Have not we had some in this church—there are such now, and there are some in heaven—who, every time we used to hear them speak, let drop pearls and diamonds while they talked about what the Lord had done for them. Dear old Mr. Dransfield—how many a time he has electrified us when he used to stand on that platform, and talk about the blessedness of God and the sweetness of religion to his own soul. You used to think a great deal more of it because he was so old. I am sure you did. It was good in itself, but still there was the age of the man at the back of it; so in that case the age gave a power to the experience which he told out to you.

The aged Christian ought to have, and I hope he often has, the fruit of *patience*. After having suffered so long and enjoyed the mercies of God so long, he ought to learn to be patient. I once heard a good Christian man say that he was confessing a fault. He said, "I am afraid that the fruit of my old age is peevishness." "No," I said, "that is not a fruit of your old age; it is a fruit of your old nature." But the fruit of old age, where there is grace in old age, should be *patience*. And oh! what fruit some of God's servants do show by way of *patience*, in poverty, in sickness, in infirmities. There used to sit here an aged woman who could not hear anything I said, but she always came because she thought it was setting a good example to the young people at home to attend the house of God. Whenever I used to speak with her there was such a charm about her conversation, because, though she was much tried, she never uttered a complaint. She could only bless the name of the Lord for everything. You remember Dr. Hamilton's story of poor old Betty, who could not do anything but lie in bed and cough, but she said, "Well, bless the Lord, whatever the Lord has told me to do I have tried to do it; and when he said, 'Betty, bring up your family,' I tried to bring them up in the fear of God. When he said, 'Betty, go to the house of God and sing my praises,' I was delighted to do it. And when he said, 'Betty, go up stairs and lie in bed and cough;' well I will do it," she said, "and bless the name of the Lord for letting me do it, so long as there is anything to be done for him."

Now, the promise is that if we be thus planted, as I have described, we shall be enabled to bring forth fruit in old age. Anything that we do with a sincere desire to glorify God in it, and anything that we bear with patience and quietness according to the divine will, is sweet and gracious fruit. We can bring forth that fruit in our old age.

One of the most delicious fruits that Christians produce in their old age is *calm, quiet confidence in God*. John Bunyan has described this in his "Pilgrim's Progress," in the beautiful picture of the land Beulah. I shall not at all object to have a grey head, and eyes like lamps whose wasting oil is spent, weak shoulders and tottering knees, if I may get to Beulah. You know that he describes it as a land that was just on the verge of the river, and so near to the celestial country that the shining ones did often cross the river, and there was a pervading smell of sweet spices all over the land, because it lay so near to the city of the blessed that when the wind blew that way it wafted the spices across, and they could, in quiet places of the land, often hear the songs of the shining ones who wandered there. The inhabitants were at perfect rest. The land was called Beulah, for God's delight was in her. They that dwelt in her were called Heph-zibah, for they were married unto the Lord; and they were sitting there, many of them, close by the brink of the river, waiting till a message should come from the king, for the king's messengers every now and then came into the country, and they said, "The pitcher is broken at the cistern. Rise up, my love, and come away." And so, one by one, the Beulahites crossed that river. On bright sunshiny mornings they were known to cross it singing, "O grave, where is thy victory?" Well, it is that patient abiding, that quiet waiting, that holy confidence, that divine anticipa-

tion, that sweet expectation of the coming glory, that is one of the fruits which believers bring forth in old age, and whenever we see it we prize those golden apples, and long for the time when we may bear them too.

But now notice that the text does not speak of old age merely bringing forth fruit, but it says—"They shall be fat and flourishing," which means that Christians, in their advanced years, shall have a fulness of savour and life in them. I have known some Christians, both old and young, that have been very dry sticks, not fat and flourishing, certainly; they had very little savour, very little unction, though they had very sharp teeth to bite the young people with; they were very critical, very ready to look harshly at them, and ask them hard questions; and, if they could not spell the biggest word in the whole confession of faith, they have said, "Ah, the young people nowadays are not like what they used to be in my time." We have known some of that sort. But when they are planted in the house of God, and God makes them to flourish, they are full of the juice of love; they are full of Christian kindness and gentleness; they are full of life; they are full of real vigour—not the vigour of the flesh, but the vigour of the Spirit; and they love the Lord and delight in him, and delight to help the young people, and to encourage them in the ways of the Lord. Oh, I like to see an old man thus fat and flourishing.

And it is added, in addition to their being fat, that they shall be flourishing. It means that the aged believer shall have a special verdure. This flourishing means his profession; and how delightful is the profession of Christianity in advanced age. I do not mean that some people get exceedingly attached to the pastor whom they have heard for many, many years. One old woman used to say that she liked to hear the old minister better than anybody else. "Well, but," they said, "he is getting very feeble." "Oh," said she, "but then I recollect what he used to be, and I would sooner see him shake his head than I would hear anybody else preach." And I have no doubt that, though that grows to be an infirmity and folly, there is something praiseworthy in it, because you recollect the times and seasons when the Lord refreshed your soul by him: and there is a moral glory about a man as you look at him who has been, say for fifty years, living and labouring as a public professing Christian, without a stain upon his reputation—not a spot on his character. Why, the young people say, "Bless God! if he has kept him, why should he not keep me; and if the Lord has sustained him under many trials, why should he not sustain me?" It is not what the man says; it is the man that says it that gives force to all he says. It is what you know is behind the voice; it is the experience of the Lord's goodness; it is the long-continued honourable conduct which God has enabled him to evince, and to show to others, by the abounding grace that was within him, which preaches in accents louder than the finest voice can articulate.

Now, I do pray that every young man here—and I am glad to see so many young men—will seek to be one day amongst the old men whose profession shall be the very strength of the church, because of this consistency. I will not say to my elder brethren—because the Lord will say it to them—that they ought to remember what manner of people they

ought to be, seeing that God has been so gracious to them these many years.

IV. I close with my fourth point, which is **THE MANIFESTATION THAT AFFORDS CONCLUSIVE PROOF OF THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS.** "To *show* that the Lord is upright." These good folks are to bring forth fruit, and to be fat and flourishing, on purpose to manifest before the eyes of all men "That the Lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

"That the Lord is upright." Well, how does the fruit-bearing of an aged Christian show that? Why, it shows that God has kept his promise. He has promised that he will never leave them nor forsake them. There you see it. He has promised that when they are weak they shall be strong. There you see it. He has promised that if they seek him they shall not lack any good thing. There you see it. He has promised them, "Thy bread shall be given thee; thy water shall be sure." Hear what they have to say, and you will see it. He has said, "Even to hoar hairs I am he. I have made and I will bear, and I will carry you as in the days of old." There you have it. Ask them. There you see it. We put "Q. E. D." at the end of a proposition when it is proved. So you may put that down at the end of the problem of life. God is good to his people. The old man stands up, and says, "Truly God is good to Israel. If you could hear my story, young man, you would see it before your eyes, and it would show that the Lord is upright."

Nor is it only that he keeps his promises, but the Lord is kind and generous towards his servants. I always think it a shameful, heartless thing to turn adrift, when he gets old, a man who has been in your service from his youth. It is one of the things that have become more common in present than in former times, to turn out old servants. Since you have had the pith of their life—the marrow out of their bones, do keep a roof over their heads; grant them a pension, or at least a pittance; supply them with a bit of bread and cheese till they die. I think it is only right that an old servant, a faithful servant, should be so treated. You know how David puts it. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." It is not likely that he would, is it? Such a God as he turn his old servants off! You remember the Amalekite who had a master that was an Egyptian, and the master left him to perish, and David found him. Ah, well, that is how the Egyptian masters do, but that is not how our Master does. Thou wilt not leave or desert me when my age and my infirmities multiply upon me. When these eyes grow dim thou wilt look upon me; when another shall guard me, and lead me whither I would not, thou still wilt be my friend and helper, and lay thy finger on my eyelids as I close them in the hour of death. It is a faithful God we serve, and he keeps his people alive in their old age that they may show that he is a faithful and upright God.

Now, David added at the end, "He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." I want every one of my elderly friends to add his Amen to this sentence, and to set his seal that God is true. Come forward as witnesses, attest the deed while it is being executed, and put your names to the record and say, "I bear witness to that." At least

I want you in the silence of your hearts to come and say, "Yes, I can bear witness." David says, "He is my rock." My aged brethren, can you say, "God is the rock on which my hope is founded—my foundation, and he has never failed me. The rock will never shake, never move, never give way. He is the rock of my defence—the 'rock of ages' chert for me." I have hidden myself in him, and I have been safe. He is the rock of my abiding. I have dwelt in him and lived in him, and I have found him my castle and my high tower. He is a rock for immutability." Can you say that, brethren? He has never changed—never. He has been "without variableness or shadow of turning." Every good and perfect gift have I received from him. Bear witness to it. This is what is wanted in this age—that you should bear witness that God is a rock, firm, strong, faithful, immutable—the defence of his people.

And then "there is no unrighteousness in him." I would have you bear witness to that. You have had some sharp troubles. Have you ever had more than you ought to have? You have had many losses. Have you really lost anything in being a Christian? You have been brought very low. Have you ever been left and deserted altogether? You have gone through fire and through water, but has the fire consumed you? Has the water drowned you? If you have anything to say against God, you old servants of his, let us hear it. No, but the older God's people get the more they praise him; and one reason why I am sure that God must be a good God is that I always find that all his servants want to get their children into the same house, into the same family. A man is not badly treated by his master when he says, "My ambition is to have my boy follow me." Oh, I can speak well of my Lord and Master in all that he has ever given me to do, but it is the joy of my soul to think that my sons should follow me in the love of Christ, and the preaching of the gospel. We who are younger men, but yet who have had a good deal of tossing to and fro, can say, "He is my Lord, and there is no unrighteousness in him. No, not a flaw in him—not one unkindness, not one unfaithfulness, not one forgetfulness, not one angry word, not one thing but what has been full of love." He has said, "I have sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, or rebuke thee," and he has kept his promise; and up to this hour we cannot discover speck, spot, or flaw in all the transactions of his providence. Though sometimes they have been mysterious, they have always been right: blessed be his name for ever and ever.

Oh, who would not be planted in the courts of such a God as this, to be kept even to old age, and to be blessed with such unspeakable blessings world without end? God grant you all to be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that he might be glorified.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xcii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23, 178, 732.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE DANGER OF UNCONFESSSED SIN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."
—Psaln xxxii. 3.

It is well known that in ordinary cases grief which is kept within the bosom grows more and more intense. It is a very great relief to shed tears; it gives a vent to the heart. We sometimes pity those who weep, but there is a grief too deep for tears, which is far more worthy of compassion; we ought most to pity those who cannot weep. A dry sorrow is a terrible one, but clear shining often follows the rain of tears. Tears are hopeful things; they are the dewdrops of the morning foretelling the coming day. So is it also a very great consolation to tell your story to a friend: I do not know whether it would not be a comfort to speak it to a little child, even if the child could not understand you. There is something in telling your sorrow and letting it out; otherwise it is like a mountain tarn which has no outlet, into which the rains descend and the torrents rush, and at last the banks are broken and a flood is caused. Let thy soul flow forth in words as to thy common griefs, it is well for thee. A festering wound is dangerous. Many have lost their reason because they had good reason to tell their sorrows, but had not reason enough to do so. Much talk hath in it much of sin, but a heart full of agony must speak or burst; therefore let it talk on and even repeat itself, for in so doing it will spend itself.

"Sorrow weeps!
And spends its bitterness in tears;
My child of sorrow,
Weep out the fulness of thy passionate grief,
And drown in tears
The bitterness of lonely years."

We shall now, however, think of spiritual sorrows, and to these the same rule applies. "When I kept silence," and did not pour out my sorrow where I ought to have confessed it, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

No. 1,366.

Is it not a great mercy for us that we have the Book of Psalms, and the life of such a man as David? Biographies of most people nowadays are like the portraits of a past generation, when the art of flattery in oils was at its height. There is no greater cheat than a modern biography: it is not the man at all, but what he might have been if he had not been something else. They give you a lock of his hair, or his wig, or his old coat, but seldom the man: they make huge volumes out of a heap of his letters which ought to have been burned, and copy little scraps of pictures which he used to draw for friends, and neither the letters nor the sketches ought ever to have been published. Like burglars, they break into a man's chamber and purloin his hidden things; they hold up to the public eye what was meant for privacy only, and expose the secrets of the man's heart and hearth. Things which the man would never have drawn or written if he had thought that they would meet the public eye are dragged forth and brought out as precious things, and so they are, but precious nonsense. We have no biographers nowadays. When Boswell died the greatest of all biographers died, and he was not far removed from a fool. If a man lives a noble life he may well shrink from dying, because he knows what will become of him nowadays when writers of his memoirs unearth him and tear him to pieces. David's psalms are his best memorial. There you have not the man's exterior, but his inward soul; they do not reveal the outward manifestations of the man, but you see the man's heart—the inner David, the David that groaned and the David that wept, the David that sighed and the David that sinned, the David that yearned after God, and the David that was eaten up with the zeal of God's house—the man who was born in sin and groaned over sin, and was yet the man after God's own heart. What a wonderful autobiography of a wonderful life that Book of Psalms is! David was a many-sided man, and his life was like the life of our Lord in this respect—that it seemed to comprehend the lives of all other men within itself. There is no man, I suppose, who has known the Lord in any age since David wrote but has seen himself in David's psalms as in a looking-glass, and has said to himself, "This man knows all about me. He has been into every room of my soul—into its lowest cellar and into its loftiest tower; he has been with me in the dens of my inbred sin and in the palaces of my fellowship with Christ, from which I have looked upon the glory of God." Here is a man who "seems to be, not one, but all mankind's epitome." Though we mourn over David's sin, yet we thank God that it was permitted, for if he had not so fallen he had not been able to help us when we are conscious of transgression. He could not have so minutely described our griefs if he had not felt the same. David lived, in this respect, for others as well as for himself.

I am thankful that David was permitted to try the experiment of silence after his great sin, for he will now tell us what came of it—"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

We shall apply this first, as it should be, to the *erring child of God* convinced of his sin; and then, secondly, we shall remind you that the

same rule holds good with *the awakened sinner in whom the Spirit of God has begun to work a sense of guilt.*

I. First, LET US THINK OF THE CHILD OF GOD. Children of God sin! Some of them have claimed to be well-nigh free from it; but—I will say no more; I think they sinned when they talked in such a lofty strain. God's children sin, for they are still in the body. If they are in a right state of heart they will mourn over this, and it will be the burden of their lives. Oh that they could live without sin! it is this that they sigh after, and they can never be fully content until they obtain it. They do not excuse themselves by saying, "I cannot be perfect," but they feel that their inability is their sin. They regard every transgression and tendency to sin as a grievous fault, and they mourn over it from day to day. They would be holy as Christ is holy. To will is present with them, but how to perform that which they would they find not.

Now, when the child of God sins, the proper thing for him to do is at once to go and tell his heavenly Father. As soon as ever we are conscious of sin, the right thing is not to begin to reason with the sin, or to wait until we have brought ourselves into a proper state of heart about it, but to go at once and confess the transgression unto the Lord, there and then. Sin will not come to any very great head in any man's heart who does this continually. God will never have great chastisements in store for those who are quick confessors of sin. You know how it is with your child. There has been something broken, perhaps, by carelessness: there has been some violation of a rule of the house, but if he comes and catches you by the sleeve, and says, "Father," or "Mother, I am very sorry that I have been doing wrong"—why, you know, while you are sorry that he should transgress you are glad to think that his heart is so right that without being questioned he comes of his own accord and tells you so frankly that he was wrong. Whatever grief you may feel about his fault, you feel a greater joy in the frankness of his confession and the tenderness of his conscience, and you have forgiven him, I am sure, before he has got half way through his openhearted acknowledgment. You feel that you cannot be angry with so frank and penitent a child. Though sometimes you may have to put on a sour look, and shake your head, and reprimand, and scold a little, yet if the little eyes fill with tears, and the confession becomes still more open, and the sorrow still more evident, it is not hard to move you to give the child a kiss and send him away with, "Go and sin no more: I have forgiven thee." Our heavenly Father is a much more tender Father than any of us, and therefore, if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father forgive us our trespasses. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him," and therefore he has compassion upon the children of men when they acknowledge their offences. We are not more ready to forgive our children than our heavenly Father is ready to forgive us. We may be quite sure of that. And so, if it be our habit—and I do trust it is—never to suffer guilt to lie upon our consciences, but to go as soon as ever we are sensible of a fault and own it before the Lord, asking pardon from him for Jesus' sake, there will be no great amount of damage done to ourselves,

and the Lord's anger will not wax hot against us, neither will severe chastisements happen to us. We may endure sharp afflictions, because they are often sent for another purpose, but we shall not have visitations of paternal wrath. Many trials are not sent for chastisements at all, but as preparations for higher usefulness; for every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, evidently not because of any offence in the branch, but even because the branch is good and does bear fruit, and, therefore, it is allowed the special privilege of the pruning knife that it may bring forth more fruit. Speedy and full confession will not prevent tribulations which are meant merely for instruction, but it will avert trials which are intended as severe chastisements; and this will be no small benefit. Did not David pray, "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure"?

Now, it sometimes happens that God's children, when they have done wrong—especially if they have done very, very wrong—do not go and confess it. When there is the most necessity for confession, there is often the greatest tardiness in making it. It was so in David's case. Alas! how foully had he fallen! It is never to any purpose to try and excuse David's sin. There are certain palliating circumstances, but he never mentioned them, and, therefore, we need not. Indeed, if David were here to-night, and we were to begin excusing his sin, he would rise with tears in his eyes and say, "For God's sake do not attempt it. Let it stand in all its deformity, that the power of God's mercy may be the more clearly seen in washing me and making me whiter than snow." But David's heart was very naughty. It was sound towards God as a rule; there was deep love to God always there, but it had become overlaid and crusted with what was always David's great besetment—the strong passions of his impulsive nature. He had followed in some measure the ill example of neighbouring kings, in taking a number of wives to himself, and this had fed rather than checked his natural tendencies; and at length in an evil hour, he fell into a crime of deepest dye. He knew that he was doing wrong. He sinned against light and knowledge, but, alas, he did not hasten to his God and confess the grievous crime.

I think I can see why he could not have gone straight away from the sin to confession, for *the sin prevented the confession*—the sin blinded the eye, stultified the conscience, and stupefied the entire spiritual nature of David. Hence he did not confess at once; but surely he felt as if he must own the fault when the time came for prayer. I have no doubt that David prayed after a sort, but he must have presented very formal and mutilated prayers so long as he refused to acknowledge his transgression. When the time came for David to finger his harp, perhaps he did so, and went through a song or a psalm; but he could never reach to the essence of true praise by pouring out his heart before God while the foul sin was hidden in his bosom. How could he? His psalms and his prayers were silence before God, whatever sound he made, for his heart did not speak, and God would not hear him. However sweet the tone or the tune, his songs were nothing to the Most High, for his heart was silent. And why was he silent when he knew that he was wrong? Why did he not go to God at once? Well, it was partly because he was stupefied by his sin. He was fascinated,

captivated, and held in bondage by it. Oh, brethren and sisters, beware of the basilisk eye of sin. It is dangerous even to look at sin, for looking leads to longing. A look at sin often leads to a lusting after sin, and that soon ripens into the actual indulgence. No man even thinks of sin without damage. I saw a magnificent photograph in Rome, one of the finest I had ever seen, and right across the middle there was the spectre mark of a cart and two oxen, repeated many times. The artist had tried to get it out, but the trace remained. While his plate was exposed to take the view, the cart and the oxen had gone across the scene, and they were indelible. Often in the photograph of a fine building you will see the shade of a man who passed by, who is there represented by a sort of ghostly figure. Upon our soul every sinful thought leaves a mark and a stain that calls for us to weep it out—nay, needs Christ's blood to wash it away. We begin with thinking of sin, and then we somewhat desire the sin: next we enter into communion with the sin, and then we get into the sin, and the sin gets into us, and we lie asoak in it. So David did. He did not feel it at first, but there he was, plunged into the evil deeps. In such a state sin does not appear burdensome. A man with a pail of water on his head feels it to be heavy, but if he dives he does not feel the weight of the water above him because he is actually in it and surrounded by it. When a man plunges into sin he does not feel the weight of the sin as he does when he is out of that dreadful element; then he is burdened by it. So David did not feel his guilt at first; he knew that he had done wrong, but he did not perceive the exceeding heinousness of his evil deed, and therefore he did not confess it.

Next, *there was much pride in David's heart.* Have you a child who, when he has offended, knows he is wrong, but will not own it? If so, you talk to him, but he will not speak: he is quite silent, or, if he does speak, it is not in the right way; he makes some naughty, obstinate, strongheaded speech. You cannot bring him to say, "Father, I have done wrong;" but he tries to excuse himself in this way and that. Perhaps he partly denies the fault, and only mentions certain things that other people did, by way of excuse for himself. Now, what our children do to us we have often done to God. We have sullenly stood it out before him. I remember well a story of a reputable Christian man who on a certain occasion was betrayed into drinking. He was a long time in distress of mind about his sin. He had been drunk, but when he was spoken to about it, as he was, by some of the officers of the church, he said that he was "overtaken," and added that "a very little affected him." I think that is what he said; and he pleaded that some others had been overtaken too, and he did not see why such notice should be taken of a little slip. All this he said to leave a loophole for himself. When he had done saying that, he would add—Well, he did not know, he did not believe that he was drunk; he was sure that nobody could prove that he was, though he might have taken a little more than was good for him. His tongue talked in that way, but his heart knew better. He was a child of God, and he knew he was wrong, and he never got peace by making these shocking self-defences. He was, indeed, terribly tortured in his soul, till at last he went down on his knees, and said, "Lord, I have been drunk. There is no use in denying

it: I, who am thy servant, have been drunk. Forgive me for thy mercy's sake, and keep me henceforth from even tasting of the intoxicating cup." He honestly confessed his transgression, and a sweet sense of pardon followed at once. It takes some professors a long time to get up to that point. We call our sin by some other name, and fancy that it is not quite so bad in us as it would be in others. Oh, the ways we have got of trying to extenuate; and, oh, the sullenness which has sometimes been put on and carried out for days and days together before the living God by God's naughty children when they have fallen into an ill-temper.

I have no doubt that some have been silent before God for a time as to the confession of their wrong, *because of fear*. They could not believe that, after all, their Father loved them. They thought that if they did confess they would receive a heavy sentence and be overwhelmed with wrath. David had often looked up into the face of God and known his love; but now that he had thrown dust into his own eyes he could not see God's face, and he only felt God's chastening hand, for he says, "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." The sun burned him up, but afforded him none of the sunshine of the face of God. Unbelief is sure to follow sin of the kind committed by David. When it has brought on sullenness of temper, then we begin to think that God deals hardly with us, whereas it is we that are dealing hardly with him. If we would confess, all would be well; but there is the hard point. It is not, *if* he would forgive, for he is ready to blot out the transgressions of his people, but the difficulty lies in *if* we would believe in his love. There is a great deal of the Pharisee in many Christians. You may question the statement, but I should not wonder if there is a good deal of the Pharisee *in you*, or else you would not have doubted the assertion. You are so much of a Pharisee that you do not think yourself a Pharisee. But we are prone to begin thinking, "Surely, surely, I at such a time was a worthy object of God's love, but now I am not." Oh, then, you were once a wonder of goodness, and marvellously worthy and excellent? Do not believe it. My dear brother, perhaps you were as bad when you had not openly transgressed as you are now, for then your disease may have taken the form of pride, and though it has now taken another shape, it may be no worse, for pride is as damnable as any other form of sin. He who says to himself, "I am righteous: I can stand before God and deserve his love," is as surely lost as though he had fallen into gross sin. Take heed of the Pharisee that lurks within you.

Anyhow, whatever was the reason, David was silent about his sin for some long time. The result of it was that his sorrow became worse and worse. He could not pray: he tried to pray, but as he would not confess his sin, it stuck in his throat, and till that was out he could not pray. But still he *must* pray; so he took to roaring. That is to say, it was such inarticulate, indistinct prayer, and there was so much of his soul in it, that he calls it the roaring of a beast instead of the praying of a man. His inward grief over his unconfessed sin was such that his bones began to wax old. They are the pillars of the house, the strongest part of the entire system, but even they seemed as if they would decay. He was brought into ill health of body through the

torment of his mind. He could find no peace, and yet he would not go and confess the sin. He was still sullenly looking up to God, not as a sinner, but as a saved one, and talking to God as if he were righteous, while at the same time his sin was crushing him. All this while, I say, his grief gathered, and there was only one cure for it: he ought to have confessed it to the Lord. As soon as it was confessed he was forgiven. How quick was that act of amnesty and oblivion! David said, "I have sinned," and Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." If pardon be so near at hand, who would linger a moment? Who among us would not at once repair to our heavenly Father, and with our heads in his bosom sob out the confession of our sin? Because he is so ready to forgive we ought to be ready to confess.

I may be addressing a child of God, or one who thought that he was a child of God, who has grievously fallen. My brother, go thou with haste to thy Lord, and acknowledge thine iniquity. He bids thee come. Only confess thine iniquity in which thou hast transgressed against the Lord, and he will have mercy upon thee now. And oh, what a relief it is when you have discharged the load, and when the voice of mercy has said, "Thou art forgiven: go in peace." What would I give for that, says one. Well, thou needest not give anything. Do but confess, and if thou confess into the ear of God, with faith in his dear Son, for Jesus' sake he will accept thee, and seal thy pardon home to thy soul. Come and unburden thy spirit at the bleeding feet of the Redeemer, and leap for joy.

Thus have I tried to encourage the Lord's own children to own their sins. I do not know for whom these words are particularly meant, but I am driven to say them, for I labour under the strong impression that there is some child of God here who is almost despairing of the Lord's mercy and who is well nigh ready to renounce his profession of religion because he fears that the Lord's mercy is clean gone for ever. My dear friend, judge not so harshly of him who loves thee still. Did he not love us when we were dead in trespasses and sins, and will he not love us if now our sin has wounded us again? He never loved us because we were good, and therefore as he knew all that we should be, he will not change in his affection. He "commendeth his love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly"—died for us *as sinners*. If you never did come to him—if all your religion has been a mistake—do not begin to argue upon that matter, but come to Jesus now, for the first time. Many and many a score times have I done that. When the devil has said, "Your faith has been mere delusion, and your experience has been all a fiction," and I have replied, "I will not dispute with you, Sir Devil, but I will just go to Christ as a sinner, for I know he came to seek and to save sinners, even lost ones, such as I am; and I will humbly ask him anew to be my Saviour." That is a short cut to comfort, may the Spirit lead you into it. Be not baffled by Satanic suggestions, but come to Jesus over again, and over again, and over again, "to whom coming as unto a living stone"—looking unto Jesus—not having looked once, but continually looking and trusting in him.

II. But now I must have a few minutes, while we use this same subject in reference TO THE AWAKENED SINNER.

Some in this place, perhaps, have lately been aroused to a consciousness of guilt before God ; but one thing they have not done, they have never made confession of their sin. They feel the burden of it in a measure, and they will feel it more, but as yet they have kept their grief to themselves : neither to God nor man have they poured out their souls. To speak to our fellow-men about our heart troubles is comparatively of little use, and yet I would not recommend persons under conviction of sin always to hide their souls' sorrows from their Christian friends. They might often be much helped if they would communicate their thoughts to those who have gone further on the road to heaven, and know more about Christ and the way of salvation. Yet, for the most part, a wounded conscience, like a wounded stag, delights to be alone that it may bleed in secret. It is very hard to get at a man under conviction of sin ; he retires so far into himself that it is impossible to follow him. Ah, you poor mourners, I know how you try to conceal your pains. I will tell you one reason why you do not like to tell your mother, your sister, your brother. It is because you think your feelings are so strange : you suppose that nobody ever felt like you ; you have the notion that you must be the worst person that ever lived, and therefore you are ashamed to tell what you feel for fear your friends should scout you out of their society. Ah, poor soul ; you do not know ; you do not know. We have all been on your road. When you tell of your sin, you put us in memory of the way in which we talked, perhaps five-and-twenty years ago, or more, when we, too, felt sin a burden as you feel it now. When you tell us of the greatness of your sin, and think that we shall surely despise you, and never speak to you again, tears of joy are in our eyes to think that you feel as we did. We are glad to discover your tender and contrite spirit ; we only wish that thousands felt as you do. Do you not remember what George Whitefield said when his brother at the dinner-table said that he was a lost soul ? Mr. Whitefield said, " Thank God," and his brother wondered. " Why," said Whitefield, " Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost." The more black you think yourself to be, the brighter is our hope of you ; when you poor tremblers give yourselves an awful character we know it is correct, and we do not wish to contradict you, but we are glad to hear you say it, and to know that you feel it, because now we see in you that which will prepare you to value a precious Christ. A man who says, " I am well clothed," is not likely to accept Christ's righteousness. But when he cries, " How naked I am, how useless are these fig-leaves," he is the man for Christ's robes. When you meet with a man who says " I am full ; I feast on my own righteousness," what is the good of inviting him to the gospel banquet ? You must invite him, for you are commanded to do so ; but he will refuse to come. But when you meet with another who is hungry, and faint, and ready to die—ah ! there is the man for your money. Bid him come where the oxen and the fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. His mouth is watering while you speak to him, and he will come with you, and sit down at the banquet of the King. We are glad, poor sinner, to hear your tale ; and therefore the next time you meet with a Christian, I would advise you to tell him a little of it. But still that is not what you most want. You need to lay bare your deep sorrow before

your God; and, oh, if you do it, there stands the promise, "He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy." Confession before God was never sincerely offered but absolution from the Most High was sure to follow.

Remember that, even though you do not go and tell the Lord, he knows already, and therefore concealment is in vain. He needs not your confession for his information, but for your own benefit. But if you do not confess to him, you certainly will never obtain pardon, for there is not between the covers of the holy Bible a single intimation that God will ever pardon unconfessed sin. If you cover and cloak it, and feel no repentance about it, and do not bring it to Christ, you cannot expect to receive mercy from the offended Lord.

Now, it happens with some that, though they are conscious of sin, they do not confess it; and what is the result? Why, it increases their misery. It is impossible that you should find peace while sin continues to gather in your soul. It is a festering wound: the lancet must be let in, there cannot be rest until it is so. I have known a sinner before confession of sin feel as if he could lay violent hands upon himself, so intense was his anguish. Well do I remember repeating to myself the words of the prophet, "My soul chooseth strangling rather than life," for of all the tortures in this world an awakened conscience, pressed down with a sense of guilt, is the worst. The Spanish Inquisition invented cruel racks and thumbscrews, but there is no inquisitor like a man's own conscience, for it can put the screw upon the soul to the uttermost degree. Let a man's conscience loose upon him, and at once the worm commences to gnaw, and the fire begins to burn. They used in olden times to ascribe the torment of hell to the devil: but we do not want any devil for that; conscience can measure out an infinite misery. Let but remorse lay its thongs of wire upon a man, and it will scarify him, and gash him to the very soul. So long as a man continues silent before God, and does not own his sin, if the Lord really has begun to deal with him, he will have to suffer more and more from the pangs of conscience.

But, then, increase of sorrow accompanied by this silence is a very dangerous piece of business. I spoke cheerfully just now of those of you who are under a sense of sin, but it was only in the hope that you would go to God, through Jesus Christ, and confess your sin; for if you refuse to do so, your position is one of very great danger. "What danger?" say you. Why, if sin remain festering within you, and your sorrow increases, you will come to despair altogether, and that is an awful prospect indeed. You remember John Bunyan's picture of the man in the iron cage? There is not in the "Pilgrim's Progress" an incident more terrible. Now, you are forging the bars of a cage for yourself as long as you refuse to acknowledge your guilt before God. Those who are in the iron cage of despair will tell you that they delayed to acknowledge sin, that they refused to accept Christ, that they suppressed their feelings, and so brought themselves into bondage. They were pleased to hear ministers preach about conviction of sin, and speak of deep sorrow, and the like; but they did not care to be told that it was their duty, there and then, to believe in Jesus: they could not endure that doctrine. They liked to be comforted in the notion that there was

something good in feeling a sense of sin, apart from believing; whereas, if a soul will not believe in Christ, its sense of sin may be an evil instead of a benefit to it. Nothing can be good that is unsalted with faith. "With all thy sacrifices thou shalt offer salt;" and if the salt of faith be absent, the sacrifice is unacceptable.

We have known some who, through getting into despair, have afterwards fallen into utter hardness of heart. They used to be malleable; they used to feel the strokes of the divine hammer; now they feel nothing, but are as hard as the blacksmith's anvil. They have got into such a condition that they wickedly say, if God will save them they will be saved, but they have nothing to do with it. They once were tender; now they are presumptuous. They say "there is no hope," and therefore, on the theory of the old proverb that they may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb, in all probability they will go on to commit worse sins than ever. Some of the biggest sinners that have ever disgraced the name of humanity have been persons who were once tender of conscience and were on the point of conversion, but they did violence to conviction, came to despair of ever entering heaven, and in the end determined that as they must go to hell they would go there with a high hand and an outstretched arm. He who has seen heaven's gate open before him, but has not stepped in, is the man who above all others is likely to find the hottest place in hell. You may think it strange for me to say so, but I know it is so, for such persons go by the way of despair into hardness of heart, and then into the grossest transgression. Yes, and this is the back door to atheism, for when a man feels that God and he never can be at peace,—when he has made up his mind that he never will confess his sin,—what is the first thing that he does to comfort himself? He says—"There is no God." And what does the declaration, "There is no God," mean? It means this, that the man feels that he would be much more happy if there were no God. That is what it means, and nothing more. It is the man's wish rather than his creed, and he wishes it because he despairs and his heart has grown hard. Oh, when God makes your heart soft as wax, mind who puts the seal upon it. If the Spirit of the living God set not the seal of deep repentance and holy faith upon the softened soul, there is another that will put the seal of despair, and perhaps of atheism and of defiant sin upon it; and then woe worth the day to you that ever you were born. Refusal to confess is a perilous thing for your soul. I am sure that when a man begins to be awakened to a sense of sin, if he tarries long in that condition he is being entangled moment by moment in the Satanic web. The devil cares little about careless sinners. "Let them alone," says he, "they will come to me by-and-by." And as for very religious people who possess no true godliness, the devil does not bother them; he says, "No, let the hypocrites be in peace; they are going my way as nicely as possible. Why should I arouse them by causing them mistrust as to their state?" But the moment that souls are startled into a sense of sin the devil says to himself, "I shall lose them," and so he plies all his arts, and uses all his craft, if by any means he may prevent their escape. Man, now is your time to flee away to the city of refuge without tarrying even for an hour, for even now all the devils in hell are after you. They did not trouble about you before,

but they are after you now with sevenfold energy. Close in with Christ, then, and at once escape them all. Oh, may the Spirit of God enable you now to find eternal mercy through the confession of your sin to God and looking to Christ for mercy—the mercy which he is so willing to give.

This is the last point. There is no hope, then, of any comfort to a bruised heart except by its confessing its guilt. I would earnestly urge upon every one conscious of sin to go with troubled heart and heaving bosom and confess his transgression to the Lord at once. I would do it in detail, if I were you. I find it sometimes profitable to myself to read the ten commandments, and to think over my sins against each one of them. What a list it is, and how it humbles you in the dust to read it over! When you come to that command—"Thou shalt not commit adultery," "Ah," say you, "I have never been guilty there." But when you are told by the Saviour that a lustful glance breaks that command, how it alters all! Then you perceive that fleshly desires and imaginations are all sins, and you humble yourself in the dust. You read also, "Thou shalt not kill,"—"Well," say you, "I never killed anyone"; but you change your note when you hear that "he that is angry with his brother without a cause is a murderer." When you see the spirituality of the law, and the way in which you have broken all the commandments ten thousand times over, be sure to confess it all, right sorrowfully. I find it good to look all round sometimes, and think, "I am a father; there are my sins against my children. Have I trained them up for God as I should? I am a husband; there are sins in that relationship. I am a master; there are sins in that position: how have I acted towards my servants? I am a pastor; how many sins occur in that relationship?" Why, you will not look around you, if God opens your eyes, without being helped to see what you ought to confess. Take the very limbs of your body, and they will accuse you: sins of the brain in evil thoughts, sins of the eye in idle glances, sins of this little naughty member, the tongue, which does more mischief than all the rest. There is no member without its own special sins. There are sins of the ear—how often have we heard the gospel, but heard it in vain. On the other hand, have we not too often lent a willing ear to unholy words, and to wicked stories against our neighbours? I need not read over the calendar of our offences from this pulpit; go and write it out in the closet, and pour out a flood of tears over it. If you are willing to confess, everything will help you to confession, and there is good reason for doing it at once. May the Holy Spirit work with its tenderest influences to melt your heart into contrition.

Remember while you are confessing, that each one of your sins has a world of evil in it. There is a mine of sin in every little sin. You have taken up a spider's nest sometimes—one of those little money-spinner's nests—and you have opened it. What thousands of spiders you find hanging down and hastening away in divers directions. What a myriad of them. So in every sin there is a host of sins. There is a conglomeration of many kinds of evil in every transgression, therefore be humbled on account of each one. Confess your iniquities before God, and accept the punishment as being your righteous due. There stands the block, and there is the place for your neck; put it down, and say, "Lord, I

submit to my sentence, and if thou biddest the headsman strike I cannot complain." Go before God as the citizens of Calais came before the English king, with ropes about their necks. Submit yourselves to the punishment due to your offence, and then make an appeal *ad misericordiam*, to the mercy of God alone, and say, "For Christ's sake—for his blood's sake—have mercy upon me." There is no man, woman, or child in this Tabernacle who shall do that to-night who shall be rejected; for "him that cometh to me," saith Christ, "I will in nowise cast out." And this is the right way of coming—the way of confessing your sin and acknowledging the evil of it and turning to the great Substitute for deliverance. Say that you deserve to be sent to hell, and cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, trusting in the great Surety and Sacrifice, and you shall be accepted in and through him. This is the way of life, and he who runs therein shall find salvation.

May the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, lead every one of you without exception to mourn your sin, and rest in Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms li., xxxii.

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STRONG FAITH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 15TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But was strong in faith, giving glory to God."—Romans iv. 20.

ABRAHAM is the father of the faithful. When children have a noble father it is a good thing for them to be fully conversant with his character; and therefore we shall do well to consider the life of the great patriarch, especially marking that grand excellence which makes him the father of believers, namely, his faith. Nor should we fail to observe *the strength* of his faith, for in him it reached a very high degree: he was not only a believer, but he was an unstagging believer. He did not only trust God, but he trusted God most firmly, in the teeth of all contradiction, not so much as considering the difficulties, but believing in God without questioning. Oftentimes I have exhorted unbelievers to faith, but now my word is directed to those who have faith already, bidding them manifest more faith. Where there is the root of faith we plead for the growth of faith; where there is life our desire is that it may be found more abundantly. If you have not believed at all, then the gospel cries to you, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" but if you have believed, its voice is, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We cannot talk to unbelievers upon the subject of strong faith, because they have none to begin with; if they had even the weakest faith, it would save them, and become the germ of the highest assurance, but without a beginning how can they be exhorted to increase? There must first of all be the seed of faith in the heart, and then it will be wise to water it, but to water barren ground is lost labour. Have you given glory to God by believing in the Lord Jesus? Then may you glorify him more by a stronger confidence, but not till then. Those who have faith in God are constantly to be exhorted to grow in all graces, and especially in the most important and fundamental grace of faith. They are permitted to pray, "Lord, increase our faith," with the assurance that "he giveth more grace." My present address will have strong faith for its subject, let those who have believed strive after it.

No. 1,367.

Is it needful for me to remind you that as faith at first is the work of the Holy Spirit, so must any real growth in it be of divine operation? Any addition to faith which could come to you by or from the flesh, if such a thing were supposable, would be an adulteration of faith, and not an increase of it; for evermore that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Even if an increase of faith could come to us by the will of man, and not by divine working, it would not be worth the having, for it would be a counterfeit. Only the sap of the trunk can make the branch grow: he who gave thee faith at the first must give thee more faith if thou art to become strong in it. Yet there is the parallel truth never to be forgotten, that while faith is the gift of God it is also our own act. The Holy Spirit works faith in us, but we ourselves personally believe; the Holy Ghost does not believe for us—what has he to believe? It would be altogether absurd to conceive of the Holy Ghost as believing or repenting! Nor if such a thing were possible could it be of any benefit to us, for the faith which saves the soul must be personal and cannot be performed by proxy. Faith is both God's gift and man's act. The Lord is the author of our faith, but we ourselves believe. In the same manner, though the strengthening of our faith will come through the Spirit of God, yet must it be our own act and deed: we must ourselves believe more firmly, and our own heart must be exercised to attain to the highest privilege. As unbelief is a sin for which the unbeliever must be held responsible, even so is the feebleness of faith a fault for which we are blameworthy. We are in duty bound to believe in God without wavering, and if we neglect the matter we shall be held guilty concerning it. It is our duty to believe, and to believe in the highest degree; and though some professors can never see the consistency of the two statements that faith is the gift of God and yet the duty of man, we are sure that the one is as true as the other; and so while I shall earnestly refer you to the Spirit of God for strength in order to obtain more faith, yet I shall not apologise for unbelief, or treat strong faith as a work of supererogation, for which God has no claim upon us. I most earnestly declare the responsibility of each believer, and claim from him, as the righteous due of a faithful God, that he do henceforth believe in him more fully than he hath heretofore done. May the remarks I shall offer be used by the Holy Ghost to the increase and establishment of your confidence in God.

I. Our first point is this: **STRONG FAITH, WHEREVER IS EXISTS, IS SUPPORTED BY ABUNDANT REASONS.** It is never chargeable with being unreasonable fanaticism or blind credence: it is a sound, prudent, justifiable thing.

For, first, *all the reasons which justify our believing in God at all justify our believing in him most firmly and continually.* You do not need that I dwell upon this, because it is self-evident: it can never be right to believe unless the statements are true, and if true they deserve undivided faith. If you have trusted your soul with your Redeemer because of the efficacy of his atoning blood, that argument pleads with you to trust him yet more steadfastly and confidently. If anything be strong enough for you to trust your eternal destiny to it, your trust ought not to be tintured with suspicion, or soured with mistrust; it ought to be unalloyed as pure gold, and immovable as a granite rock. **Either no**

confidence or great confidence can be logically defended, but a divided heart cannot be justified by reason. Dear brother, little faith will save thee if it be true faith, but there are many reasons why thou shouldst seek an increase of it, and among the rest this forcible one,—thy conscience cannot justify the weakness of thy faith, nor answer the question, “Wherefore dost thou doubt?” If thou believest at all, why dost thou doubt at all? If God be worthy of trust, he is worthy of abundant trust; if it be well to lean on him at all it must be well to lean hard. Is the Lord faithful? then do not both trust and mistrust, believe and disbelieve. Is the promise sure? then do not believe it a little and doubt it a little. Elias spake concerning Jehovah and Baal, “If Jehovah be God serve him, and if Baal be God serve him”; so also would I demand in this matter: if the gospel be a lie, deny it, but if it be a truth, believe it. Be no longer content to mingle unbelief with faith, as if this were the utmost credence that God’s children could give to their own Father. It is time that this mental twilight came to an end, and that the day was known to be day, and the night to be night. Hesitating and questioning, hoping and fearing, make but a lame walk for a Christian pilgrim, and are unreasonable and indefensible. As the legs of the lame are not equal, so such a state of mind has not the balance which a wise man should seek after. If thou goest up to the ancles in the river of faith, go further, even up to the loins, or to full swimming depth, for, if it be right to enter into faith’s stream at all, every possible argument proves that the deeper you go the better.

Reasons for strong faith may be found in abundance in the character of God. He is not like ourselves, for in him is no mixture of truth and falsehood, wisdom and folly, power and weakness. Our reliance upon man must be cautiously given and measured out with great prudence, for man is only man; but “the Lord is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.” His character absolutely demands implicit faith, insomuch that, while meditating upon this subject, I felt ashamed of myself that I should need to pray for faith in God. It is a clear evidence of our dire depravity that we should need to be helped to believe in one who cannot lie. It seems inevitable that a creature should trust its Creator, and especially such a Creator; and it would be inevitable if that creature were not exceeding depraved. For a child to trust its father is natural, so natural that no one counts it a virtue. How marvellous is our moral perversity that we should be so far gone out of our right condition of heart that we have to argue ourselves into believing our God, and even then succeed not till the Holy Spirit gives us faith. It ought to be a very hard thing for a Christian to doubt his heavenly Father; in fact, it ought to be impossible, seeing that the divine character is incapable of falsehood. Beloved, should we not have strong faith who believe in a God whose very essence is pure truth? Where deception is inconceivable doubt should be impossible. Thou believest that never shadow of untruth ever stained the character of thy God, why then dost thou not render to him strong faith? Thou believest also that God is infinitely wise, and therefore he has never spoken rashly nor promised what it might be wiser to withhold. The promise was not delivered in haste, or so unguardedly that it might be necessary to retract it; and therefore no alteration can be supposed. The covenant of promise stands secure

even as to its jots and tittles. If it had been foolish it might pass away, but since it is ordered by eternal wisdom it will outlast the everlasting hills. Come, then, beloved, should not the utmost confidence be rendered to him whose every word is steeped in infallibility? Shouldst thou not believe with all thy heart and soul and strength in him whose truth stands fast like the great mountains?

Moreover, O man of God, thou believest in One who is omnipotent, and therefore thy believing should be strong. Thou knowest how to answer that question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" for thou believest that with God all things are possible. If it be so, then his true word spoken in wisdom can readily enough be carried out: he has but to will it, and it is done. God's word is fact: for him to purpose is to perform: can there then arise any condition or circumstance which he cannot meet? Wherefore these doubts? In the presence of an Almighty Promiser unbelief is as ridiculous as it is sinful. "The strength of Israel will not lie," neither may we treat him with mistrust.

Thou knowest also that thy God is immutable. All things else change, but thy God knoweth no shadow of a turning; he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Is he the same? He doth not take back the word that goeth out of his mouth, nor reverse his divine decree; why then question and suspect him? Better far to believe immutably in an immutable God. Canst thou not rest in him who saith "I am Jehovah; I change not"?

Thou believest also that he is the God of love, full of goodness, mercy, and lovingkindness. What a wanton insult it is to mistrust one who cannot be unkind, whose very nature it is to bless his creatures, and whose innermost soul is set upon loving and blessing his own elect. Hast thou confided in him? then doth he not assure thee that he has graven thy name upon the palms of his hands, that he has loved thee with an everlasting love, and therefore with lovingkindness he has drawn thee. Wilt thou fly in the face of changeless love, and coldly question it? Can it be possible to trust it too confidently? Surely all these things, and much more, in the glorious character of the ever-beloved God, demand of us the strongest imaginable faith.

Then, again, when I turn mine eyes from pure deity to him who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, *even our Lord Jesus Christ*, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, it appears incongruous that the blessed Son of God should be received with meagre confidence. God dwelt among men in human flesh, you know it to be true that so it was: Jesus, the Son of God, abode upon the earth throughout a lowly life amidst poverty and shame, and, (wonder of wonders), at last he poured out his heart's blood for our redemption; and can we entertain a doubt of his ability to save? Do we see those blood drops from his hand and heart, sealing the everlasting covenant, and can we doubt? Abraham had strong confidence when he saw the smoking furnace and the burning lamp passing between the pieces of the slain victims, and what ought our confidence to be when we behold the Lord Jesus Christ himself ratifying the eternal covenant by his own death? Surely if the patriarch could find rest in the sight of the type only, we ought to rest without thought of fear. When faith beholds the divine antitype, no thought of disquietude should ever arise again. My soul,

what more dost thou want? Is there not here more than enough of solemn pledge and surety? Are not founts of assurance opened in the bleeding Saviour which are deeper than all fear and higher than all hope? That wondrous sacrifice is as high above thy thoughts at their best as the heavens are above the earth, and wilt thou return doubts and fears as a fit recompense for such a divine confirmation of eternal love? O Lord, help thy servants to be strong in faith!

One other reason is perhaps of less weight than those which have gone before, but I cannot withhold it. It is this: we ought to give to God strong faith, because *there is no evidence to the contrary*, nor any supposable evidence which could justify mistrust. All adown the ages those who have trusted in him have never been confounded. Our fathers trusted in him, and he helped them to suffer and to bear, to attempt and to accomplish, to live and to die. We read just now, in the eleventh of the Hebrews, the record of what the Lord wrought in those who believed in him. Now, on the other side, *per contra*, there standeth nothing. Has one child of God come forward wringing his hands and saying, "God hath not fulfilled his word, and his promises are false"? We have stood, many of us, at the bedside of dying saints, and the truth generally comes out there, yet there is not one among us, most familiar with such scenes, who ever heard a solitary believer declare that it is a mistake to confide in the blood of Jesus, or an error to rest in the faithfulness of God. Somewhere or other this thing would have come out if it had been so: if the Lord had been false to one of his people we should have had sure record of it, and I think we might have trusted the devil and his myrmidons, who delight in infidelity, to have circulated such a report, pretty largely, all over the world, if they had known one such an instance; but they have not one to report. "He forsaketh not his saints."

Furthermore, I will appeal to your own experience,—have you experienced anything which casts suspicion upon the character of God? Has the Lord been a wilderness unto you? When you have trusted him has he failed you? Will you put your finger upon a promise which he has broken? Search the book through and through, and find if you can one single word of his against which you must write "false." Oh, no; the promise tarries sometimes, but it never lies. There is a waiting time for the testing of your faith, but in the end it will be seen that he has withheld no good thing from them that walk uprightly, and you will have to say at last, like hoary headed Joshua, "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." Brethren, ought we to doubt our God when we have no cause to show for it? Is there any apology for little faith since we cannot remember any instances of prayers unheard, deliverances denied, or mercies refused? We have nothing of the kind to quote, and therefore when we doubt the Lord we are guilty of wanton distrust,—may the Lord forgive us and deliver us from it.

So much upon that first point, the strongest faith is supported by bundant reasons.

II. And now, secondly, according to the text, STRONG FAITH PRODUCES THE MOST DESIRABLE RESULTS. We have not time to go into many of these, but we will dwell upon one, the one mentioned in the text, "Strong in faith, giving glory to God." Why, this is what we live

for—to glorify God. Every man who is truly a child of God feels that he has no object which at all approaches to this in importance; his chief end is “to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.” Well, then, since strong faith answers to that end we ought earnestly to desire it; but how does it appear?

Well, strong faith glorifies God because *it treats him like God*. Unbelief is practical atheism; because, denying the truthfulness of God, it takes away what is a part of the essential character of God, and so far mars his very existence. I would not say a word to grieve those who have but little faith, for the least faith is saving and is most precious; but still faith wherein it is weak does not treat God like God, it bounds and limits the Holy One of Israel! It believes him up to such a point, or under such and such circumstances, and this is not to act towards him as omnipresent and omnipotent. Strong faith treats God according to his infinite character: it does not suspect him, because it knows him to be the God of truth; it does not doubt the possibility of his accomplishing his promise, because it knows him to be God all-sufficient; it does not question his faithfulness, because it knows him to be absolutely immutable. Alas, we often deal with God as if he were like ourselves, or like our fellow-men. We are fickle, and we suppose that he is so; our fellow-men promise and fail us, and we act as if our God were like to the son of man, who is but a worm. O beloved, it robs God of glory when we act towards him otherwise than as he is, but it glorifies him when we gain a scriptural conception of what he is, and act towards him under that aspect, and what is that but to trust him without staggering? To me, when I look at it calmly, the strongest faith does not appear to be a wonder, it is only what the Lord has a right to receive. Considering the folly and depravity of man, faith is a marvellous production of grace; yet looked at from the Godward side of it, the strongest possible faith in God is only what God may justly claim. Say you not so, O believers? Does not your Lord deserve to be trusted at all times?

Further, strong faith brings glory to God, because *it treats him as a Father*, and acts towards him in the childlike spirit. It is very beautiful to see the confidence which our children repose in us. Why even when the man is utterly unworthy of respect you will see the little child still believing in his father. And as for those who are favoured with parents who are wise and gracious, there is, there should always be, an implicit reliance upon father's judgment. I have known boys quote their father with as implicit a reliance as Christians quote Scripture, or as confidently as a Catholic quotes a bull of the Pope. Indeed, what is a father after all but the papa, the pope, of his child to a very great degree; and though that confidence may be mistaken, yet it is natural to the child to feel it, and it is a sad pity that it should too often be rudely repressed by the father's folly. Now, every child of God ought to have unlimited confidence in God. Is he not my Father? Can my Father do an unkind thing to me? Can my Father be untrue? Can my heavenly Father be false or changeable? Impossible! The child of God does not boast of his faith, for it is only a simple childlike trust, yet it glorifieth God more than all the sorts of proud reason, for it calleth him by the name which he loves,

and it putteth him into the place which he delights in, namely, that of Father to his own chosen.

Again, strong faith honours God because *it strengthens all the other graces, and these all bring glory to God*. Without the graces of the Spirit in him a man cannot glorify God. That therefore which will produce in our character all those various lights which are the reflections of the divine excellence as it shone in the Lord Jesus, is the chief means of our glorifying God, and is therefore to be prized. Faith is the root of whatsoever things are lovely and pure and of good repute, and in proportion as it is strong all these precious things flourish, therefore it greatly tends to magnify the Lord.

Strong faith peculiarly glorifies God because *it gives a striking testimony to the world*. I do not think the world notices much the common faith of ordinary Christians; the faith which relies upon God ordinarily in good times the outside world does not think much of; but even carnal minds are compelled to view with astonishment the faith which glories in God when all temporal things are swept away. The faith which can practise eminent self-denial, or which can achieve, through the power of God, enterprises which appear foolhardy to mere reason, that is the faith which attracts the eyes of men; they see your strong faith, and they glorify your Father which is in heaven. I pray God that we may always have such a faith that it may be worth while for men to study it. I have known some faith which would have required a man to put a microscope to his eye to be able to perceive it at all, and when we have declared that little faith saves the soul, the worldling has replied, "Well, it is a very small concern, at any rate." Brethren, ask that your faith may grow; let it embrace God heartily, let it rest in him without a fear, and even the ungodly will be obliged to confess that this is the finger of God.

Strong faith glorifies God again because *it enables him to work great works in us and through us*. As our Saviour could not do many mighty works in a certain place because of their unbelief, so is God hampered with regard to some of us, because we have such little confidence in him. He has given to some men all the abilities necessary for the conversion of many souls, all the knowledge, all the utterance and a large part of the zeal; but they do not believe in him, and therefore they are not established. Some men's words actually create distrust in the minds of others, for they themselves are so diffident in spirit that they rather balk the children of God in their progress than help them to advance in the divine life. Search, O my brethren and sisters, whether it be not so. He who has little faith will be made useful according to the littleness of his faith, but, if he had more, the Master might use him more. If we trusted more, our life would be holier, happier, serener, more close with God, and more useful; and why should we not? Give me a reason why we should not. Oh, Spirit of the living God, why should we not? Help thou us now to be strong in faith, giving glory to God!

III. Now I advance to a third observation, which I trust may give some comfort to those who are little in Israel. **STRONG FAITH WHICH GIVES GLORY TO GOD MAY BE EXERCISED BY PERSONS WHO ARE OTHERWISE EXCEEDINGLY WEAK.** What a joy this is to you who are sufferers in body. You do not often creep out of your bed which is now growing so hard through your having laid upon it these months.

It is quite a holiday to you to be found in the house of God now and then. Well, dear brother, dear sister, you cannot do apostolic work and range a continent, fervently blazing out the truth, but you can have strong faith in God: you may exhibit a placid patience, a sweet resignation, a sacred hopefulness as to the future, a divine disdain as to the fear of death; and if these abound in you the circle of friends who know you and tenderly watch you are receiving from your example the utmost benefit, and perhaps, though you may not be able to enter into active service, you may be tutoring others by the strength of your faith, and they will accomplish great things as the result of your example. At any rate, the weakness of your body need not prevent your exercising the strong faith which glorifies God.

So, too, dear friends, you may have but few talents, you may be conscious that you have no brilliancy of intellect, that you are not persons of remarkable parts or attainments, and yet you may glorify God by strong faith. You need not be a genius in order to give glory to God, for the strength of your faith will do it. Many a man who is of slender intellect glorifies God far more than your great thinker, because the great thinker is too often filled with a high conceit of his own thoughts, and will not follow God's word, whereas the poor unintellectual believer rises superior to him by taking the intellect of God to be his guiding star. You can glorify God, dear brethren, by holding firmly to the truth of which you understand so little, but which you love so heartily. Though you do not know the whole of its meaning you are in much the same condition as your more advanced brethren, for who knows the whole meaning of God's mind? What you do know you are resolved to hold with iron grip, and by so doing you greatly honour your Lord.

Some saints are conscious of weakness of every sort, but they must not, therefore, think that they cannot honour God by strong faith, for Abraham, of whom the text is spoken, was a special instance of this. He was so old that his body was now dead, and yet he believed that he would be the progenitor of the chosen seed. He knew that death was written upon him as to all that matter, and yet he was quite certain that God who had promised would certainly perform. Do you feel this morning almost dead spiritually? Dear lover of Jesus, have you wandered from him, so that your consciousness of life in him is dimmed and you hardly know whether you are in him or not, for you are so lethargic, your soul cleaveth to the dust? Now is the time to trust him: when sin abounds, when fears are thickest, when temptations are most furious, when want comes upon thee like an armed man, now is the time to trust in God. Summer weather faith is poor stuff, but a faith which burns on through the long, dark, dreary winter, a faith which is not damped by the rain nor buried by the snow-storm,—this is faith indeed, and glorifieth God. The depth of your weakness is just the height of your possibilities of honouring the Lord. If you are nothing, so much the more room for God to be everything; if you are unworthy, the more room for confidence in the righteousness of Christ; and if you are dead, you are the better able to prove the truth of your Lord's words concerning the believer, "though he were dead, yet shall he live." God grant us grace that whatever our circumstances or conditions, we may have the same conquering faith towards God.

IV. Now, fourthly, **THIS STRONG FAITH VARIES AS TO ITS MANNER OF WORKING**, very much according to the person and his circumstances. There is one thing that strong faith does not do which some think it would be sure to do—it never blusters, and it never talks big and boasts of what it will accomplish. “Though all men should forsake thee, yet will not I,” is not the language of strong faith, that is the prattle of Master Peter with his pride uppermost. Some men are in their own opinion in such a fine condition that they could push the whole world before them, and drag the church after them: I do not know what they could not do. Yes, but there is a great deal of difference between confidence in yourself and confidence in God. I have noticed that the faith which goes forth against the world with the dauntless courage of a lion is the very faith which lies down like a lamb at Jesus’ feet. The next thing to “I can do all things” is “Without Christ I can do nothing.” Consciousness of personal weakness attends a brave reliance upon God, and shows itself in modesty and quietude of manner. Barking dogs do not often bite, and those men who promise much very seldom perform. Strong faith has a quiet tongue, and does the daring deed without preliminary boasting. It does not advertise its coming victories, but falls upon the Midianites at dead of night, and with its lamps and pitchers puts them to the rout. Point me to one boastful word that ever fell from Abraham. All the Scriptural heroes of faith were doers, and not blusterers. David said little to his envious brothers, but he brought home the giant’s bleeding head, and bade its dumb mouth tell of what he had done.

Faith exercises itself as in the case of Abraham, by believing God’s word. God had said many things to Abraham, and Abraham believed them all. That is a rare thing nowadays. The school of modern thought, which considers itself to be the most infallible thing now extant, always cuts and shapes divinity according to its own views of what it ought to be; in fact, it has a God of its own, cut out of the brown paper of its philosophies—a God of soft effeminacy, who is no more like the Jehovah of Abraham than the Venus of Paphos. These men believe, not what the Bible says, but what they imagine it ought to say. Their doctrinal views are like the camel which was evolved by a German philosopher out of his own consciousness: he had never seen one, but he produced it according to his own notion of what it ought to be, and he was very strong against humps; he would never believe that a real camel had a hump, because his consciousness did not suggest such a thing. Much of intellectual religion nowadays is just that: we have certain gentry about who evolve a gospel out of their own brain, and of course they utterly despise the gospel which actually exists because it is not like their model. We are asked to bow down and worship the calf which comes out of their furnace, but that we shall not do while our faith is strong. We believe God’s every word as far as we know it. If I know a doctrine to be in God’s word, it is infallible to me. If I have ever in thought gone beyond that which is revealed, I do heartily repent of such presumption; brethren, say you not so? If I see in God’s Book two truths which I cannot square with one another, I believe them both. There is a middle term somewhere, though I know not where to find it; and for the present I

believe without that explanatory truth. There are the two things, God has said them, and they must be true, and it is mine to believe them. Let God be true and every man a liar. This is where strong faith is wanted in these days; we need a settled creed, and a clear, comprehensive view of revealed truth, even if we should in consequence be called old-fashioned or imbecile. We need to be more old-fashioned than ever. I am a Radical in many things, but in the doctrines of the gospel I would have you to be Conservative to the backbone, not for an hour yielding any point of truth to the most brilliant thinker that the world can produce. Thinkers are not appointed to tinker up a gospel for us; thank God, we have a perfect gospel already. Their shifting gospel changes about every ten years, and comes out spick and span as a new theology, but we have grasped the old infallible truth, and we mean to hang to it for dear life, being strong in faith, giving glory to God.

But Abraham's was not alone receptive faith: his was a faith which *obeyed the precept*. The test of his obedience was the strange command to take his only son and offer him up for a sacrifice, but he went to do it, and in God's account he did do it, for he had the will to do it at God's bidding. You and I must be willing to do what God tells us, as God tells us, when God tells us, because God tells us, but only strong faith will be equal to such complete obedience.

Then Abraham's faith awakened in him *great expectations*. He was looking for an heir, an heir from whom should spring a seed as the stars of heaven for multitude; he expected that quite as confidently as you and I expect to-morrow. We shall be full of expectation if we have strong faith: looking for blessings, expecting prayers to be answered, and promises to be fulfilled. We shall not cry "How wonderful!" every time a prayer is answered, but we shall reckon it a matter of necessity that God should stand to every word that cometh out of his mouth. May the Lord give you such strong faith as this, and may it work in this fashion.

But time chides me, as it did the apostle when he entered upon this subject. You may well pardon me if I am prolix, for even so was he, until he said, "Time would fail us to speak of Gideon and Jephtha," and so on.

V. Our last point is, FAITH IS ESPECIALLY TO BE EXPECTED IN CERTAIN QUARTERS. Here I wish to speak very pointedly and personally to all my brethren and sisters in Christ.

Dear friends, there ought to be strong faith in us who know God. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee"; and if he does not forsake the seekers, much less will he forsake those who have found him and trusted in him. Brethren, there are some men you can trust till you know them, but if it be true that when you do know them you can no longer trust them, it proves that they have a bad character. Now, you who know the Lord ought never to throw your God under such a suspicion. If you know him, trust him. I know you will.

We expect strong faith next from those who have had a long experience of him. We can almost forgive you young people who have just started in the Christian life if you are vexed with doubts and fears, though truly God does not deserve them even of you; but when your sires begin to

doubt, what shall we say of them? What, have you known him fifty years and cannot you trust him yet? What, my dear brother, has the Lord kept you till you are seventy! How long do you expect to live? To eighty? Well, he has been good to you for seven tens, cannot you trust him for the last ten? What, tested him over and over again, and never found a flaw in his fidelity—been in deep waters and kept from sinking, and yet are you mistrustful? What are those things upon your feet? Shoes of iron and brass. He said they should be. Are you afraid that after all you will be footsore and shoeless? He promised, “as thy days so shall thy strength be.” How has it been? Why, you say, “It has been so up to this moment;” then why not to the end? Speak well of the bridge which has carried you over so many times. As I have already said, you cannot put your finger upon a single instance in which the good Lord has deceived you, and if you never doubt your Lord till you have reason for it you will never doubt him at all. Come, come, let those of us who have been twenty-five years in the ways of God put aside our childish doubts. Yet I warrant you this is easier said than done; and, though we talk thus, and we know it is true and right, alas, our nature goeth readily astray into a wicked and provoking distrust of God.

Further, dear friends, those ought to trust him *who have lived in fellowship with him*. If you have been on the top of Tabor; if you have known the kisses of his mouth and tasted of his love, which is better than wine; if you have been emparadised in his arms, in the full assurance of faith and the enjoyment of perfect love; why should you come down from the mountain and distrust him? God forbid that we should do this. May the recollection of the hill Mizar and the Hermonites come freshly over our minds this morning, and may we rest in our God.

Those *who are getting near to heaven* ought not to distrust him. I see upon some of you the marks of the coming end. The snow flakes of many winters lie on your brows, nay, the wind has blown even those away from some of you and left the summit bare. You will soon behold your Lord, your eyes will soon see the King in his beauty in the land that is very far off. Do not let it be among the last memories of earth that you doubted your Beloved. Oh, you who have known him from your youth, and have proved his faithfulness till you have come to palsied age, do not now begin to suspect your gracious God. You do not doubt the partner of your bosom, who has shared your sorrows for half a century and has been the comfort of your life,—you do well to trust in her, for it is said of such, “The heart of her husband doth safely trust her”; but surely she is not to be relied upon so implicitly as your God! Oh, dear aged brother, permit one who is but a little child compared with you to entreat you. Console and cheer the younger people by the exhibition of confidence and serenity wrought in you by strong faith.

Lastly, *we who are teachers of others ought to have strong faith in God*. I think we may at times profitably mention our own doubts and fears for the encouragement of those who are terribly downcast, but it ought always to be done with very great prudence and much regret. I recollect once speaking of my own tremblings, when preaching, and a venerable brother said to me afterwards, “I do not think, dear pastor,

that you were right in speaking of your own transgressions so freely. You encouraged the people certainly by what you said about yourself, but I hardly think they ought to be encouraged. Now, suppose you were to go into the pulpit and say 'there are some of you who are thieves; it is very wrong of you, but still do not despair, for I thieve a little myself.' Why, you know," he said, "you would not be doing good, but harm; and yet thieving is not more truly a sin than doubting God, in fact there is the utmost sin in unbelief." I replied to my good brother that he was right, and I thanked him for the correction. Whenever, dear hearers, you catch any of us who are teachers doubting and fearing, do not pity us, but scold us. We have no right to be in Doubting Castle. Pray do not visit us there. Follow us as far as we follow Christ, but if we get into the horrible Slough of Despond, come and pull us out by the hair of our heads if necessary, but do not fall into it yourselves. Never say, "My beloved pastor went there, and therefore I may go there." No, but say, "Even our minister fell into that error, and therefore I will keep as far from it as ever I can, for if the teacher slips the disciple may easily do so, and therefore I must very carefully watch against unbelief."

Brethren, we shall never succeed in winning sinners to faith if we preach what we do not intensely believe. I do verily believe that the sinner is lost, and that unless grace saves him, he is lost for ever. I believe that eternal punishment will fall upon him unless he repents and believes in Jesus Christ. I do believe that Jesus shed his precious blood, and that whosoever believeth in him is saved beyond all fear of destruction, saved by the blood of the Lamb. We must preach in a believing manner, knowing our message to be true, or else men will die in unbelief. And, what is more, I do not think we shall have many conversions unless we expect God to bless the word, and feel certain that he will do so. We must not wonder and be astonished if we hear of a dozen or two conversions, but let the astonishment be that thousands are not converted, when they hear such divine truth, and when we ask the Holy Spirit to attend it with divine energy. God will bless us in proportion to our faith. It is the rule of his kingdom.—"According to your faith so be it unto you." O God, give thy ministers more faith! Let us believe thee firmly! Oh, that we could believe thee up to the fullest possible measure of faith, and never doubt thee again. If the enemy number thousands, give us the faith of Samson to throw ourselves upon them, and in the name of God to smite them, and though we ourselves as to all power to convert others are as dead men, and though the sinner be dead, yet help us to believe that souls can be begotten again by the preaching of the gospel, and let us preach with confidence in the divine power. O Lord, grant this to us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews xi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—125 (Song II.), 229, 230.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GOD OF PEACE AND OUR SANCTIFICATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 5TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."—Hebrews xiii. 20, 21.

THE apostle, in the eighteenth verse, had been earnestly asking for the prayers of the Lord's people. On the behalf of all his brethren he said, "Pray for us;" and for himself he added, "I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." If the apostle needed the prayers of his brethren, how much more do we who are so greatly inferior to him in all respects. We may, indeed, even with tears appeal to you who are our brethren in Christ, and entreat you to be earnest in your supplications to God on our behalf. What can we do without your prayers? They link us with the omnipotence of God. Like the lightning-rod, they pierce the clouds and bring down the mighty and mysterious power from on high. But what the apostle was anxious to receive he was careful to bestow, and therefore he proceeded in the words of our text to plead for his brethren; from which we learn that if we desire others to pray for us we must set the example of praying for them. We cannot expect to be benefited by other men's prayers unless the spirit of supplication dwells in us also. In this matter the Lord will give to us good measure pressed down and running over according as we give unto others. Other hearts shall be stirred up to intercede for us if we are ourselves diligent in intercession. Pray, if you would be prayed for.

The prayer before us was an exceedingly wide one, for Paul had learned to ask great things of the Lord. The Holy Spirit had filled him with much love to the Hebrews, and with strong desire for their welfare; and, therefore, he asks for that which is the greatest of all blessings to the people of God, that they may be fit for every good work, and that God may work in them to do that which is well-pleasing

in his sight. When we plead for God's own beloved people we are safe in asking for the best of blessings : if we feel straitened in pleading for ourselves there can be no reason in being so in reference to them, since we know that the Lord loves them and abounds towards them in grace through Christ Jesus.

It is noteworthy that this prayer or benediction comes at the close of the epistle, even as in Christian assemblies the benediction is pronounced at the end of the worship. Let the end of all our acts be a blessing to men and a doxology to God. As long as you live, dear brethren, endeavour to bless others, and when you die conclude life with a blessing, even as your Lord and Master did, who as he ascended to heaven was seen with outstretched hands blessing his people. As Jacob would not let the angel go until he blessed him, so we should not cease from preaching or writing in the name of the Lord until we have a comfortable persuasion that a blessing has come upon our brethren.

This prayerful benediction is an exceedingly instructive one. It has within itself the whole compass of the gospel, as one might show if this were our object at this season. It is condensed spiritual meat ; much in little ; all things in one blessing. Every word is as a pearl for value, and as the sea for depth. It is not the object of prayer to instruct our fellow men : a decided distinction ought always to be drawn between praying and preaching, and those err greatly who under the name of prayer not only instruct, but argue and exhort ; yet it is a remarkable fact that there is no inspired prayer in Scripture but what is full of teaching to those who are willing to study it. Take any one of the psalms, — though they be addressed to God, yet within them the preacher finds a thousand texts from which to inculcate the doctrines and the precepts of the Lord. As for the prayers of our Lord Jesus, they drop fatness ; that which is commonly called "the Lord's prayer" contains a world of doctrine, and that glorious prayer in the seventeenth of John is as honey from the honeycomb. Now, since the same Spirit that wrought of old worketh also in us, I conclude that he will lead us also to pray to the edification of those who hear us. Though the foremost object of prayer be not the instruction of our fellow men, yet prayer ought to be full of good matter and worthy of the consideration of those whom we invite to join in it ! Public prayer would be a far better means of grace to the people if those who utter petitions in public would seek preparation of heart from the Lord and enter upon the exercise with careful thought. Surely it is not sufficient to repeat a round of godly expressions which have become current in the church, but we ought to speak with the Spirit and with the understanding in our approaches to God, so that the thoughts of our fellow Christians may be excited, and their hearts united with us in our public devotions. He who prays in public a dull prayer, devoid of all thought and meditation, damps the flame of devotion, whereas it was his duty to have added fuel thereto. I invite those who take part in our prayer-meetings to lay this matter to heart.

We must, however, further note that though the prayer of Paul for the Hebrew believers is full of doctrine, yet the whole of it tends to the end which he had in view. He did not garnish his prayer with extraneous ornament, nor drag in needless doctrinal statements ; but

every word was meant to support his plea for personal, practical holiness, which was the one object of his prayer. While he shows us whence holiness must come, and how it must come, and how it is wrought in us, and what it is like when it is wrought in us, he is all along bringing forth his strong arguments with the Lord that in the Hebrew believers this holiness might be wrought abundantly. I am sure I shall have your earnest attention while I endeavour to weigh the very words of the text, since each one is full of meaning: I cannot hope in the short space of one sermon to bring out the whole fulness of its meaning, for who can hold the sea in the hollow of his hand, or compass the fulness of such a text in one brief address? Yet I would labour to give you sufficient insight into it to let you see that its lengths and breadths and depths and heights are not easily to be measured by mortal mind.

I. I call your attention to THE PECULIAR TITLE UNDER WHICH GOD IS ADDRESSED IN THIS PRAYER: "*Now, the God of peace.*" The names of God employed in prayer in holy Scripture are always significant. Holy men of old were not so poverty-stricken in language as always to address God under one name, nor were they so careless as to speak with him under such a title as might first come to hand; but in their approaches to the Most High they carefully regarded that attribute of the divine nature from which they expected the blessing which they desired. If they needed that their enemies should be overthrown they pleaded with the arm of his strength; if they were wrongfully entreated, they prayed to the God of righteousness; if they needed pardon for their sins, they pleaded with the God of mercy; and such names as Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai, are not used indiscriminately in the prayers of the saints of old, but always with selection and judgment. Why, then, did the apostle here call God "*the God of peace*"? He had a reason; what was it?

It is a Pauline expression. You find that title only in the writings of Paul. It is a name of Paul's own coinage by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. There were reasons in Paul's experience which led him to dwell upon this peculiar trait of the divine character. Each man, seeing with his own eyes, sees something peculiar in the name of the Lord; and the apostle of the Gentiles when writing to Hebrew believers saw with special clearness "*the God of peace,*" who had made both Jew and Gentile to be one in Christ, so making peace. If you look in the Epistle to the Romans, fifteenth chapter and 33rd verse, you find him praying, "*Now, the God of peace be with you all.*" In the same epistle, chapter xvi. verse 20, he says, "*The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.*" Again, in the second Epistle to the Corinthians, xiii. 11, he says, "*Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*" In Philippians iv. 9, he thus concludes his exhortation: "*Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you;*" but especially in 1 Thessalonians v. 23, there is a passage strikingly parallel to our text. He there prays, "*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly.*" Sanctification is the subject of the present prayer. Just as in our text he prays, "*Perfect you in every good work*"

to do his will," so in Thessalonians he says, "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is evident, not only that the apostle delighted in the expression peculiar to himself, but that he saw a close connection between the peace of God and the sanctifying of believers, and for this reason, both in the Thessalonians and in the Hebrews, his prayer for their sanctification is addressed to the God of peace.

The title is a gospel one. God is not spoken of as the God of peace in the Old Testament; but there he is "a man of war, the Lord is his name;" "he shall cut off the spirit of princes; he is terrible to the kings of the earth." He is frequently spoken of in the Psalms and the prophets as "the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle," and it is a part of Israel's praise of him that he slew mighty kings, "for his mercy endureth for ever." Constantly, in the older volume of inspiration, do we read of "the Lord of hosts," and of this title an old divine saith, "It hath the sound of hostility in it"; but now no longer speak we of the Lord of hosts, but of the God of peace: for, since Jesus is our peace, the enmity is slain. Messiah's reign began with songs in heaven of "peace on earth, goodwill towards men," his errand was peace, his spirit was peace, his teaching was peace, his last testament was peace, and, through his atonement, from the opened heavens the God of peace and consolation looks down upon the sons of men.

The appropriateness of the title to the particular prayer will readily strike you, for *holiness is peace*. "May the God of peace make you holy," for he himself is peace and holiness. When holiness reigned over the whole universe peace reigned also. There was no war in heaven till one who had been an angel became a devil, and fomented a rebellion against the thrice holy God. Sin brings forth strife, but holiness is the mother of peace. In perfection there is peace, and therefore Paul prays the God of peace to make his children perfect: holiness is well pleasing to him, and when he is pleased all is peace, therefore he prays him to work in them that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

The God of peace has also graciously restored peace and reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, but it has been by the putting away of sin, for while sin remained peace was impossible. "The blood of the everlasting covenant," of which the text speaks, was the sealing of a covenant of peace which God made between himself and man; for of old were there thoughts of peace in the mind of God towards his chosen. In the fulness of time the gift of Christ and his atoning death was the actual establishment of peace, for he hath made peace by the blood of his cross. He is the ambassador of God to us, and by his substitutionary sacrifice peace was effectually made, "for he is our peace": by the blood of the everlasting covenant was there a treaty made between God and his elect, which shall stand fast for ever and ever. As for our Lord's resurrection and ascension, of which the text speaks—"The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,"—that was the open proclamation of peace. So long as Jesus was in the grave peace was not openly declared: it was assuredly established, but not publicly announced; but when the Mediator rose, and especially when he ascended on high and received

gifts for men, and sat down at the right hand of God, even the Father, then before the whole universe was it declared that God was at peace with the sons of men. For Jesus is in all things the Adam, the model man, the representative of his people, and peace with him means peace with all who are in him. He died for our sins, but he rose again for our justification, which is none other than the replacing of us in a condition of reconciliation with God. He went into heaven to take possession of our inheritance; and what better evidence could there be that we are reconciled to God? If our representative sits at his right hand we may be confident that the Lord is reconciled unto us.

Beloved, if you pursue the subject you will see more and more clearly the significance of the title, "the God of peace"; for, *to make us perfect in every good work to do his will is to give us peace.* Although every Christian by faith in Christ is justified, and so has a judicial peace with God, yet we never can enjoy perfect peace with our own consciences so long as any sin is committed by us, or dwells in us. So long as there shall remain a solitary tendency to sin within these members we shall be disturbed, sin will contend with grace, and newborn grace will war with inbred sin. Sin and grace can no more agree than fire and water. Even the God of peace never tries to establish a peace between good and evil, for it would be monstrous even if it were possible. The way to peace is the way of holiness. Cast out sin, and you cast out contention. Subdue iniquity, and peace wins the victory. Beloved, it is of no use for us to seek happiness of life except by the way of holiness of conversation. I have already declared that we have peace with God through the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ; but for deep calm of heart and quiet of conscience there must be a work of sanctification within us wrought by the power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Sin is our enemy, and the new life within us is heartily at enmity with evil, and therefore peace can never be proclaimed in the triple kingdom of our nature until we always do that which is well pleasing in the sight of the Lord, through Jesus Christ.

Nor is this all. When the apostle, praying for our sanctification, prays to the God of peace, it is as much as to say to us that *we must view God as the God of peace if we are to be led to do his will.* O man, is God your enemy? Then you will never serve him, nor do that which is well pleasing in his sight. Do you at this moment feel a horror of God, a dread at the mention of his name? Then you can never do that which will please him, for without faith it is impossible to please God, and faith is the reverse of horror. You must first of all know that there is peace between you and your God, and then you can please him. This knowledge can only come to you through Christ Jesus, for peace is made only by "the blood of the everlasting covenant." When once you know that the Lord hath made with you an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, then you have leverage to work with, then are you founded upon a rock whereon you may be built up in every form of obedience, but not till then. Peace with God is the root of virtue: reconciliation by the death of his Son is the door to conformity to the life of his Son. May we know our great Shepherd

both in his dying atonement and living example as the Lord and giver of peace.

I think also that the apostle in thus praying to "the God of peace" had in his mind's eye the entire church of the Hebrews, or, if you will, any one Christian church. Brethren, it is essential that we have peace in the church. Whatever be the enmity without, *we* must love one another. If we do not walk in love we certainly cannot have prosperity. God alone can give peace to a church, and he only gives it by sanctifying its members, stirring them up to good works, keeping them in sacred activity, making them fit to labour for him, and working in them to do that which is well-pleasing in his sight. When you hear of disturbances in churches you need not so much seek to compose the differences among the members as to amend the men themselves. We should not gather so many thorns if the plants were fig-trees; wars and fightings would never spring up among us if we were not carnal and unsanctified. If we were more spiritually minded we should be more ready to forgive and less likely to offend or to be offended. "Are ye not carnal?" saith the apostle, "because one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Cephas," and the like; but once let the God of peace sanctify each believer, and then will every man seek his brother's good, and the things which make for peace. When you pray for the peace of Jerusalem remember that you can promote it by labouring after holiness.

Before leaving this first head, I would call to your notice the fact that *the title, "the God of peace," sheds a light over the whole passage*, and is beautifully in harmony with every word of the prayer. Let us read it line by line. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." War drives men down to the dead, and is the great jackal of the grave. Ah, how sadly the nations see this exemplified in the East at this moment. War brings down to death; but the God of peace brings back from the dead. The restoration of the Lord Jesus from the grave was a peaceful act, and was meant to be the guarantee of peace accomplished for ever. "That great Shepherd of the sheep"—sheep are peaceful creatures, and a shepherd's occupation hath not to do with blood-red fields of strife. We always couple with the idea of peace the quietness and repose of the sheepfold, and the simple restfulness of flocks in green pastures. Peace is the very atmosphere of pastoral scenes. "Through the blood of the everlasting covenant." The very word "covenant" is also full of peace: and especially is it so when we remember that it is a covenant of peace which eternal love has established between God and man. Where no covenant or league exists war may break out at any time, but where a covenant is once established there is peace and rest. The apostle goes on to pray, "Make you perfect in every good work to do his will." If God's will is done by us, then there must be peace, for no ground of difference can exist. "Working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight."—Oh, the soft music of these words. When all in us is well pleasing to God then indeed is he the God of peace to us. The final doxology is also very significant, for in effect it proclaims the universal and eternal reign of peace: "To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." What can there be to disturb the universe when the Lord

God omnipotent shall reign, and all nations shall glorify and extol the Ever Blessed, world without end? Not without reason, therefore, did our apostle select the title, "The God of peace."

II. We have now briefly to consider THE SPECIAL ACT DWELT UPON IN THIS PRAYER. "*That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*" Here I would have each one of you, for himself, read the passage of Scripture which I think the apostle had in his mind when he wrote these words. Turn to Isaiah lxiii. 11: "Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his Holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name?" See how this making to himself an everlasting name tallies with the last clause,—"*To whom be glory for ever and ever.*" But let us proceed—"that led them through the deep as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble." Truly, those do not stumble in whom the Lord worketh "that which is well pleasing in his sight." "*As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest,*"—there is the God of peace—"so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name"—there again is the doxology, "*To whom be glory for ever and ever.*" The historical event to which he alludes is the deliverance from Egypt and the coming up from the Red Sea. Having saved his people by the blood of the covenant, which was smeared upon their doorposts, he led them to the Red Sea, their foes pursuing them. Into the Red Sea they descended; not to its banks alone did they go, but into its very depths they passed, and there were they buried; the sea was as the place of death to them. Between its liquid walls, and beneath the cloudy pillar, which hung over the passage, they were baptized unto Moses and buried in baptism as in a liquid tomb; but lo, they come up out of it again, led safely up from what became the grave of Pharaoh, with songs and shoutings and rejoicings. The parallel is this: "That great Shepherd," who is far greater than Moses and Aaron, must needs go down into the place of death on the behalf of his people; he must, as the representative of his flock, descend into the place of sepulchre. This he did, for he bowed his head and died; but lo, the Lord led him up again from the deeps, and he arose to life and glory, and all his people with him. On that day the song might have been jubilant as that of Miriam when she chanted, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously. Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power." But now in this greater deliverance by "the blood of the everlasting covenant" the psalm is not to the Lord who is a man of war, but to "the God of peace." The honour is ascribed to the same Lord, but under a gentler name, and to him be glory for ever and ever. I have no doubt that Paul in part borrowed his imagery from the Red Sea, which is of all deliverances the most instructively typical. Is it not even in heaven the chosen type, for there they sing the song of Moses the servant of God and of the Lamb?

With that illustration to help us we shall notice that the bringing back of the Lord Jesus from the dead was the seal of his perfected

work, and consequently of our peace and ultimate perfection in holiness. The Lord Jesus could no more be holden by the bands of death, but might justly return to his throne. Because he had finished all his work, therefore the word of authority declared his freedom, and he was brought back to his former glory. Because he had wrought all righteousness therefore did he stand amongst living men; and because he had merited a crown of glory therefore did he rise even to the throne of Jehovah, to sit there till his enemies are made his footstool. His work is finished, and therefore God acknowledges the fact by bringing him again from the dead. Most wisely does the apostle pray that he who thus owned Christ's finished work would finish his Spirit's work in us. Christ is perfected; therefore, O Lord, perfect thy saints. Jesus has done thy will: help us to do it. May he that brought Jesus from the dead in token of his completed righteousness bring up also his people from all relics of their death of sin, and make them complete in holiness to the glory of his name.

Beloved, we go further yet. The bringing again of Christ from the dead was in effect the leading back of all his people. Not without the sheep did the Shepherd come, for that were to return defeated. He went down into the grave to seek the lost sheep, and, finding it, he flung it on his shoulder, and as he came up from the grave he bore upon his mighty shoulders the sheep for whom he died. The text speaks of "*Our* Lord Jesus." Did you notice that? *Ours* in his offices of Shepherd and Saviour, altogether ours as brought again from the dead. What he did was for us. He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, and therefore what he did was for the sheep. We can give many reasons why the Lord Jesus is the Great Shepherd, because he is the Shepherd, not of one congregation, but of all the saints in all ages, and because the sheep are his own, and he who owns the sheep is far greater than he who only feeds the flock for another. But the reason which just now attracts my attention is this:—if there be a great shepherd there must be a great flock. You cannot truly call any man a shepherd if he has no sheep, nor call him a great shepherd if he has not a great flock. So he "that brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep," did by that act and deed bring up the great flock from the dead too, for so long as our Lord Jesus can truly be called a shepherd, he must have a living flock; they are inseparable from him and essential to him. The church is the fulness of Christ. A king is no king without subjects, a head is no head without a body, and a shepherd is no shepherd without sheep. The idea of the Great Shepherd involves the chosen flock: his bringing again from the dead as a Shepherd involves their upbringing in him. The resurrection and the glory of Christ are thus the resurrection and the glory of all his flock, for whom he laid down his life. Glory be to his name for this. Now you see the force of the petition, which may be interpreted thus:—Lord, thou hast brought thy people up from the dead in Christ, therefore bring them up from all the death of sin; quicken them to fulness of life; perfect them in every good work to do thy will; work in them that which is well-pleasing in thy sight: because this is their spiritual resurrection, this is the giving to them what thou didst give to Christ on their behalf, therefore fulfil it unto them.

Beloved, it needs the same power to make us holy that it needed to bring our Saviour from the dead. That same power which raised the dead body of Christ must raise us from our death in sin ; and the same power which enabled the living Christ to climb from earth to heaven, and take his throne, must be exercised in living saints to make them rise from one degree of holiness to another, till they shall be presented without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, before the Father's presence. Yes, and that power comes to us because Christ has risen. "Because I live," saith he, "ye shall live also"; and because he lives to intercede, therefore his people are preserved from evil. Satan desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat ; but the great Shepherd, who was brought again from the dead, is daily watching over us, and pleading for us, and the power of his life, and of his kingdom, and of his plea, are manifested in us, so that we conquer temptation, and advance from strength to strength in our pilgrimage to heaven. The text is all of a piece, and each word is necessary and important. We have not here pious expressions strung together without reason, but every single syllable adds to the weight of the whole.

The work described in this text must be wrought in us by the Spirit of God. Jesus is the model to which we are to be conformed. Beloved, you must go down to death as Jesus did, and be buried with him, that you may rise with him. There must be in you the death of all carnal power and strength, or the power of God cannot be revealed in you. You must know the depths as Moses did, even the depths wherein proud self-sufficiency is drowned ; you must be baptized in the cloud and in the sea ; you must have over you the sentence of condemnation ; you must own in your own soul that in your flesh there dwelleth no good thing, and that you are condemned under the law ; and then there must be wrought in you a quickening, a coming to life, a coming up out of the place of condemnation and death. Happy is he who has come forth from the tomb of his former vain conversation, leaving the grave-clothes of worldliness and sin behind, coming up to be clothed with a heavenly mind, and to lead a new life, secret and divine as that of the risen Saviour ; yea, like that of the ascended Lord, "for he hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Have you realised this ? You have been buried in baptism, many of you, but were you at that time partakers of your Lord's death ? You had no right to be buried if you were not dead. Did you really know that death had passed upon you ere you were buried with your Saviour ? And now do you feel the life of God within you, quickening you to newness of life ? If so, it will daily lift you to something nobler and better, till you shall be ultimately raised to dwell where you shall never again be defiled by sin, where Satan shall be bruised under your feet, and the God of peace shall reign. When you shall dwell in perfect holiness then shall you reign in perfect peace. May he who brought our Lord Jesus from the grave to glory, bring you also along the upward way, till you are with him and like him for ever.

III. Thirdly, let us notice THE VERY REMARKABLE MANNER IN WHICH THE HOLINESS PRAYED FOR IS DESCRIBED in the text : "*Make*

you perfect in every good work to do his will." That is the first clause, but the translation is not strictly accurate. The passage would be better rendered, "make you fit in every good work to do his will," and the original Greek word (though I have not noticed that expositors observe it, yet anyone turning to the lexicon will see it,) properly means to reset a bone that is dislocated. The meaning of the text is this: by the fall all our bones are out of joint for the doing of the Lord's will, and the desire of the apostle is that the Lord will set the bones in their places, and thus make us able with every faculty and in every good work to do his will. If we take the arm-joint for our illustration, he would have it so well set that it may be capable of every movement for which an arm was at first constructed by infinite wisdom. A dislocated bone may be so badly set as only to be capable of a part of the motions natural to it; there may be a flaw in the surgery, so that certain movements cannot be performed; there may be a stiffness and an awkwardness, and even a positive inability for certain movements; this may be seen in some men's minds, but it is by no means desirable. The apostle would have every bone in us to be well set, and our whole manhood fitted for performing every form of good work to do the will of the Lord thoroughly. What a blessed prayer! O Lord, thou hast raised thy Son up in perfection, not a bone of him was broken; and now we, who are his body, need to be set together and fixed, every joint in its own place, and the whole church compactly knitted together by its bands and sinews, so that it may be in perfect order for performing the divine will. I apprehend that our text refers not so much to any one believer as to the entire church, for the apostle speaks of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by which he must mean the whole church: the apostle prays that the Lord would perfectly joint his church, put it into harmonious union, and so make it fit to do all that God meant the church to do here below. When shall we see our churches in such a case?

Alas, the disjointed members of our churches cause great pain and weakness to the body, and only holiness can put them into their proper position. If I must take the text as applying to each individual, the prayer is that you and I may be fitted to do the divine will everywhere,—fitted to suffer, fitted to labour, fitted for the meanest office in the church (which requires a great deal of fitness, by the way), and fitted for the highest work in the church, and fitted for anything that God wishes us to do; so that we may not be competent for one set of duties only, but may be ready for all things. We shall greatly glorify God if we have a complete character, in which every grace shall be manifested, and in which no single sin is seen to mar its consistency. Such is the prayer. Who can work this, good Lord? Who can work this in us? Thou canst, O God of peace, for thou didst bring up thy Son from the grave to the throne, and thou canst bring up our mangled nature, and perfect it till it shall be meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light, world without end. The first part of the prayer, then, is for fitness for holiness.

The next is for actual service: "*Working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight.*" And here I ask you to notice how all things are of God. We might have thought that the apostle would have said, "Lord, when thou hast made us fit to work for thee, then help us

to serve thee:" but he does not say so: he puts his prayer into a humbler form, and asks the Lord to work in us. What a heavy blow at all self-glory! How instructive to us! Dear brother, when the Lord makes thee fit for every good work, yet thou wilt do no good work unless he worketh it in thee. Even he who is best adapted for the performance of virtue and holiness, yet does not perform these things till the Lord worketh in him to will and to do of his own good pleasure.

Over and above this mode of securing all the glory to God notice the next clause—"through Jesus Christ." That which we do even when the Lord works in us we only do through Jesus Christ. We are nothing without our Lord, and though we do what is acceptable in the Lord's sight, yet it is only acceptable through Jesus Christ. What nothings and nobodies we are! Even when the Lord does the most for us that can be done, so that we dwell in his sight and our actions become well pleasing to him, and he looks upon us with delight, yet even then we are nothing. It is the Lord that hath wrought all in us, even the God of peace, who is all in all. To each fruitful bough he saith, "From me is thy fruit found." When your garments sparkle like the sun, it is he that transfigures you; when your face shines like Moses' through secret communion upon the mount, it is God's brightness which illuminates your brow. Our goodness is none of ours, "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

IV. Our fourth point drops into its place very naturally, for we have already seen that THE WHOLE OF IT COMES TO A MOST APPROPRIATE CONCLUSION OF PRAISE: "*To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*" To glorify God is the object of it all. We too much forget this. Praise is the flower for which the stalk of prayer exists. Praise to God is the essence of all the flowers of holiness, the otto of all the roses in the garden of the church. God's glory is the harvest for which all the ploughing and sowing of ministry, and evangelizing, must be done. Glory to God in the highest, and glory to his only begotten Son for ever and ever—this is the pure gold for which we dig the mines of godly service. It would be a very difficult question to decide to whom the last clause alludes, whether to "the God of peace," or to "Our Lord Jesus," and, therefore, I think, the safer way is to take them both together, for they are one. "To whom," that is to God; "To whom," that is to the Lord Jesus, "be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Let it be so; it ought to be so, it must be so, it shall be so. Amen. Amen.

Tarry just a minute while we give glory unto the Three-One-God. O ye hearts that love him, glorify him first as the God of peace, who had thoughts of peace, and designs of peace, and executed a covenant of peace on your behalf. Glorify him who is at peace with all his believing ones to-day. He lays his thunder by, he hangs his bow in the cloud as the token of his love, he puts aside his javelin and his buckler; he loves, he smiles, he speaks in tenderness. He is the God of peace; approach him with holy delight; adore him; glorify his name evermore.

Then magnify him, next, because he found for us a Shepherd. We were as sheep going astray, and he sent his Son to shepherd us; he took

from his own dear bosom his equal and eternal Son, and sent him here to gather us from the wilds, and save us from the wolves. Glory be to thee, thou Shepherd of Israel, and to thy Father who sent thee to this end.

Glorify him next for the covenant. What mercy is this, that God should enter into covenant with man! Adore him for the blood of the covenant, that he gave his only-begotten to die to make that covenant sure, that the purchased, blood-begotten possession might never be alienated from one of those for whom he laid down his glorious life. Glory be to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Praise him, praise him, praise him, ye blood-bought sons of men! Lift up your hearts with gratitude, and joy, and bless the Lord, who brought back the dying Shepherd to live and reign for you.

And then adore him because the power which he exerted upon Christ he is now exerting upon you. You are not perfect yet, but still in your measure you are fitted for every good work. In many ways the Lord is qualifying you for service. In some of you he is working to do, and in others to suffer, the good pleasure of his will. Bless him for every grace received, for faith however little, for love even though it burn not as you would desire; bless him for every conquered sin, bless him for every implanted grace, bless him evermore.

Bless him that he deals with you through Jesus Christ. Through the Mediator all good has come to us, and through the Mediator it will still come, until that day when he shall deliver up the throne to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all. Meanwhile we will glorify the mediatorial Lord, and extol the Father and the consoling Spirit. Even now we join with cherubim and seraphim, and adore him to whom only all worship belongs.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews xiii.

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PROCLAMATION OF ACCEPTANCE AND VENGEANCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 12TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."—Isaiah lxi. 2.

WE know that this Scripture speaks concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. We say not this as if we relied upon our own opinion, we know it of a surety from the Lord's own lips, for, reading this passage in the synagogue at Nazareth, he said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." It is Jesus of Nazareth whom the Lord hath anointed to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and our text tells us that he was also sent to make a proclamation which should usher in the year of acceptance and the day of vengeance.

Notice well the expression, *to proclaim*, because a proclamation is the message of a king, and where the word of a king is there is power. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to announce the will of the King of kings. He saith, "I am come in my Father's name," and again, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." Every word of the gospel is backed by the authority of "the King eternal, immortal, invisible," and he who rejects it is guilty of treason against Jehovah, God of all. The gospel is not of the nature of a commonplace invitation or human exhortation, which may be accepted or refused at will without involving guilt; but it is a divine proclamation, issued from the throne of the Eternal, which none can reject without becoming thereby rebels against the Infinite Majesty. Now if it be so, let us give the divine edict our most earnest attention, and take heed what we hear. When a proclamation is issued by the head of a state, all good citizens gather around to read what has been said to them, and to know what the supreme law may be: and so, when God proclaims his will, all right-hearted men desire to know what it is, and what bearing it has upon them, what the Lord demandeth or what the Lord promiseth, and what is their share therein. Beloved hearers, listening to the gospel should always be very solemn work, since it is listening to the word of God.

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Though the voice is that of man yet the truth is of God; I pray you do not trifle with it.

Nor let it be forgotten that a proclamation must be treated with profound respect, not merely by receiving attention to its contents, but by gaining obedience to its demands. God does not speak to us by his Son that we may be gratified by hearing the sound of his voice, but that we may yield to his will. We are not to be hearers only, but doers of the word. We should be quick in obedience to the command of the proclamation, swift in acceptance of its promise, and cheerful in submission to its demand. Who shall resist the proclamations of Jehovah? Is he not our Creator and King? Who is stubborn enough to refuse obedience? Or who hath brazen face enough to dispute his away? Shall not he who made heaven and earth, and shaketh them when he pleaseth, and will destroy them at his pleasure, be regarded with reverential awe by the creatures of his hand? O Son of God, since it is a divine proclamation which thou dost publish, send forth thy Holy Spirit that we may receive it with deepest reverence and lowliest obedience, lest, through our neglect, we do despite to thee as well as to thy Father. When a proclamation is not made by an ordinary herald, but when the Prince himself comes forth to declare his Father's will, then should all hearts be moved to sevenfold attention. It is the Son of God, anointed by the Spirit of God, who acts as herald unto us, and so by each Person of the divine Trinity we are called upon to bow a listening ear and an obedient heart to what the Lord proclaims. Attention, then! The Messenger of the Covenant makes proclamation! Attention for the King of kings!

With this as a preface, let me notice, that there are three points in the proclamation worthy of our best attention: the first is *the acceptable year*; the next, *the vengeance day*; and the third, *the comfort derived from both*,—"to comfort all that mourn."

I. Jesus, in the first place, proclaims **THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD**. Take the expression to pieces and it comes to this,—the year of the Lord, and the year of acceptance.

Now, what was *the year of the Lord*? There can be, I think, very little question that this relates to the jubilee year. Every seventh year was the Lord's year, and it was to be a sabbath of rest to the land; but the seventh seventh year, the fiftieth year, which the Lord reserved unto himself, was in a very marked and especial sense the year of the Lord. Now, our Lord Jesus has come to proclaim a period of jubilee to the true seed of Israel. The seed of Abraham now are not the seed according to the law, but those who are born after the promise. There are privileges reserved for Israel after the flesh, which they will yet receive in the day when they shall acknowledge Christ to be the Messiah; but every great blessing which was promised to Abraham's seed after the flesh is now virtually promised to Israel after the Spirit, to those who by faith are the children of believing Abraham.

Now, beloved, to all who believe, our Lord Jesus proclaims a year of jubilee. Let us dwell upon the four privileges of the jubilee, and accept with delight the proclamation which our Lord has made.

In the year of jubilee, as we read in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, there was *a release of all persons* who had sold themselves for

servants. Pinched by great poverty, and unable to meet their debts, it sometimes happened that men were compelled to say to their creditor, "Take us and our wives and children, and accept our services instead of money. We have no goods or chattels, and our land has been mortgaged long ago, but here we are; we cannot pay in any other way,—give us food and raiment and lodging, and we will put ourselves under apprenticeship to you." The law of Moses ordained that such persons were not to be treated harshly, nor regarded as slaves, but as hired servants, but still it must have been an unpleasant condition of servitude for a freeborn Israelite. How happy then was the morning when the jubilee trumpet sounded, and the generous law came into operation which said, "He shall serve thee unto the year of jubilee, but then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him." From that moment he owed no more service, however great his debt might have been; he looked upon his wife and children and rejoiced that they were all his own and all free from the yoke, so that they could at once return to the possession of their fathers, all live in the cottage in which they formerly dwelt, and enjoy the piece of land which they had formerly called their own. Liberty, that gladsome sound, liberty had come to them; no matter that they had long been under obligations to the creditor, those obligations ceased on the sound of the sacred trumpet. Beloved souls now present, proclamation is made to you in the Lord's name that if you are under bondage to sin and to sinful habits, there is liberty for you; faith in Jesus will set you free. If you are in bondage under justice and the broken law there is deliverance. If you are under bondage through fear of death, or from the rage of Satan, our divine Lord and Master has come into the world on purpose to break these bonds in sunder, and to proclaim liberty to the captives. Ye need be bound no longer; if ye believe in Jesus ye *are* bound no longer, but ye *are* set free from all the bondage of the law, from the slavery of Satan and from the dread of death. Take the liberty which the great Lord freely presents to you, and be no longer slaves. Jesus has brought in redemption and finished atonement, and believers are free; come and rejoice therein.

The next jubilee blessing was *the redemption of alienated possessions*. Every man had his own plot of ground in the Holy Land, but through the pressure of the times it sometimes happened that a man alienated his property: he was in need of ready money, his children wanted bread to eat, and he, therefore, parted with his land. It was gone: the vines and the figtrees, the corn and the oil, passed over to another; but it was not gone for ever, he had no power to sell beyond the year of jubilee. When the joyful morning dawned he went back to his family estate; it was all his own again, clear of all encumbrances; the little homestead, and the farmyard, and the fields, and the garden, all had come back to him, and none could dispute his right. Just so my Lord and Master declares to all who believe in him that the estate which Adam forfeited is restored to all for whom the Second Adam died. The alienated heritage is our own again. The great Father's love, and favour, and care, yea, all things, whether things present or things to come, or life or death, all are ours, and we are Christ's and Christ is God's. If we are believers, and are of the true seed of Israel, this day the Lord Jesus proclaims to us a

restoration of all the lost privileges and blessings which originally belonged to manhood. Behold, believers, all covenant blessings are yours, rejoice in them! Partake of heavenly blessings freely. Let your soul rejoice in its portion, and delight itself in fatness.

It followed, also, as a third blessing of the year of the Lord that *all debts were discharged*. The man who had sold himself had, as it were, made a composition of his debts by the sale of himself, and this implied a full and final discharge at the jubilee. The person also who had mortgaged his land up to the jubilee year had discharged his debts thereby, and when the man received back himself and his property, no further liability rested upon him, he was cleared of all charges. The jubilee did not give the man back himself and his land under a reserve, but unreservedly. If debt had still been due the release would have been a mere farce, since he would have had to mortgage his land and sell himself again directly to meet the demand. No, there was a full discharge, a cancelling of all debts, a removal of all incumbrances upon the man and upon his estate, and he was free. What a joy this must have been! He who is in debt is in danger; a honest man sleeps on a hard bed till he has paid what he owes. He who is immersed in debt is plunged in misery, driven to his wits' end, not knowing what to do. Happy is he that is delivered from debt once for all. Now behold, O believers in Jesus, your debts before the Lord are all discharged, the handwriting that was against you is nailed to the cross, receipted in the crimson lines of Jesus' precious blood. Being justified by faith ye are clear before the sight of the Eternal; none can lay anything to your charge. What joyful notes are these! Jesus makes the proclamation, who will not believe it and be glad.

A fourth blessing of the jubilee trumpet was *rest*. They had their lands, but they were not to till them for a year. No more the spade and the plough, the sickle and the flail,—they were to put away instruments of labour, and rest for twelve months. Think of a whole year of perfect repose, wherein they might worship and adore God all the week round, make every day a holy festival, and the whole year a Sabbath of Sabbaths unto the Most High. Brethren, the Israelites had no small privileges under the ceremonial covenant, if they had lived up to it, but they failed to do so, for it has sometimes been questioned whether they ever kept a jubilee at all, and whether the Sabbatic year was ever once observed. If they had obeyed the Lord they would have been favoured indeed: for in the matter of holidays and quiet resting times they were favoured above all people. Think of one year in seven of absolute cessation from toil. What repose for them! And then they had also the year after the seventh seven, so that every man who reached the fiftieth year enjoyed two consecutive years of absolute rest from all labour, and yet knew no want, for the ground brought forth plentifully, and every man helped himself. Those who had land had a good store to last them through three years, and those who had none were fed by the spontaneous produce of the soil. We live not under such laws, and if we did I am afraid we should not have the faith to trust in the Lord and avail ourselves of the divinely appointed holiday. But, beloved, we rest spiritually. He that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has entered into rest. Now no more does he strive to work out a righteousness of his own, for

he has already a divine one, and needs no other. It is his pleasure to worship God, but he no longer trembles beneath his wrath; it is his delight to do his commandments, but he toils and frets no longer as a slave under the law; he has become a free man, and a beloved child, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps his heart and mind. Being justified by faith he has peace with God, and enjoys the influences of the divine Comforter whose indwelling gives rest to the soul.

The jubilee year, according to our text, was called "the year of the Lord;" and the reason for all the four jubilee blessings was found in the Lord. First, the servants were set free because God said "they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt." (Lev. xxv. 42). Ah, poor burdened soul, if thou believest in Christ thou shalt go free, for thou art the Lord's own—his chosen, his redeemed, and therefore he claims thee, and will suffer no other lord to have dominion over thee. The devil seeks to lay an embargo upon thee, and hold thee a slave, but Jesus saith, "Let go my captives, for I have redeemed them with my blood." Jesus claims you, O penitent souls; he cries to sin as once the Lord said to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the Lord, let my people go." Jesus says of each repenting soul, "Loose him and let him go, for he is mine. My Father gave him to me—he is my chosen, my beloved. Neither sin nor Satan, nor death nor hell, shall hold him, for he is mine."

The land also was set free for this same reason, for concerning it the Lord said, "The land is mine" (Lev. xxv. 23). The freehold of the land was vested in Jehovah himself, consequently he ordained that no man should hold any portion of it by right of purchase beyond the fiftieth year, for the land was entailed and must go back to those for whom he had appointed it at the jubilee year. So the blessings of the everlasting covenant are God's, and therefore he appoints them unto you poor believing sinners, and you shall have them, for the divine decree shall not be frustrated. As surely as he appointed Christ to reign, and placed him on the throne, so does he appoint you to reign with him, and you shall sit upon his throne though all the devils in hell should say you nay.

So, too, the debts were all discharged, because on the day before the jubilee the great atonement had swept away all transgression and indebtedness towards God, and he would have his people forgive all the debts of their fellow men. All things are the Lord's, and he exercised his crown rights on the day of jubilee so far as to declare all debts discharged. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" was the motto of the jubilee, and sufficient reason for the cancelling of obligations between man and man.

As for rest, that came also, because it was God's year, and was hallowed unto the Lord. "A jubilee shall the fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field." During man's years the earth brings forth thorns and thistles, and man must earn his bread with the sweat of his face; but when God's year comes: then the wilderness and the solitary place are glad, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose. When the Lord's own kingdom cometh then shall the earth yield her increase as she has never done before. My

beloved, I trust you know the blessedness of living in God's year, for you live by faith upon his providence, casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you. This is the Sabbath of the soul, the counterpart of heaven. You behold the work of atonement fully accomplished on your behalf, and know yourselves to be delivered from all your liabilities to the law, and therefore your heart leaps within you. You are clean delivered, set free, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and therefore do you come to Him with songs and everlasting joy upon your heads.

But the text speaks also of the "*acceptable year of the Lord.*" Now, our Lord Jesus Christ has come to proclaim to sinners the Lord's acceptance of guilty men through his great sacrifice. Apart from the work of our Lord Jesus, men as sinners are unacceptable to God. Some of you know the misery of being in that condition; it is horrible to feel that the Lord is weary of you and your vain oblations. Since you have come in your own name and righteousness, God has not accepted you, neither has he heard your prayers nor listened to your cries, nor had respect unto your religious observances, for he saith, "Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear." If the Spirit of God has convinced you of your natural unacceptableness with God, you must have been brought into a very sad state indeed; for not to be accepted of God, and to be aware of it, is cause for intense sorrow. But now be sure, thou that believest in Jesus, that thou art accepted of God: notwithstanding thine infirmities and sins thou art "accepted in the Beloved," by him who hath said, "I will accept you with your sweet savour." And now, being thus accepted as to your persons, your petitions shall come up with acceptance before the Lord. As for your prayers, God heareth them; as for your tears, he putteth them into his bottle; as for your works, he counteth them to be fruits of his Spirit and accepts them. Yea, now that thou art accepted in Christ, all that thou art and all that thou hast, and all thou dost,—the whole of thee is acceptable to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thrice happy am I to have to talk upon such a subject as this. Come ye who are willing now to believe in Jesus, this is the acceptable year of the Lord; God is reconciled, man is favoured, blessings abound. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Let sin be confessed and the confession shall be accepted, and you shall find forgiveness. Let transgression be repented of, the repentance shall be accepted, and you shall hear a voice saying, "Go and sin no more; thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee." Hail! thou that art graciously accepted, blessed art thou among women! And thou too, my brother, remember the words of Solomon, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." (Eccl. ix. 7.) Come to Jesus by faith, for though you come with a limping walk, and your faith is feeble, yet shall you be accepted. Come ye who have broken hearts and sorrowing spirits, come ye that are downcast and dare not look up, this is no common time, the Lord Jesus has made it a red letter year for you; for he proclaims a year of grace and acceptance. Behold in this *anno Domini*, or year of our Lord, we have a choice year of grace set apart for us. Who will not come to our gracious Prince, accept his mercy, and live?

Thus you see we get a double meaning from the text—the year of jubilee with all its accumulated privileges of free grace, and the year of

acceptance in which whosoever will may come, and God will accept him : he cometh in the name of Jesus, trusting alone in the atoning blood.

II. May the Lord help us while we speak upon the second part of the text : the "DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD." Does not the sound of vengeance grate upon your ear? Does it not seem discordant to the sweet tenor of the passage? Vengeance! Shall that happen side by side with acceptance? Yes, beloved, this is the mystery of the gospel; the system of redemption marries justice and mercy; the method of atonement unites severity and grace; the economy of substitution blends acceptance and vengeance. This gospel mystery is to be published to every creature under heaven, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. We sweetly sang just now :

" Here I behold his inmost heart,
Where grace and vengeance strangely join,
Piercing his Son with sharpest smart,
To make the purchased pleasure mine."

Now behold in this text you have the heart of God laid bare, for you have the year of acceptance coupled with the day of vengeance. Let us explain this strange commingling, and at the same time expound the text.

In the first place, whenever there is a day of mercy to those who believe, it is always a day of responsibility to those who reject it, and if they continue in that state *it is a day of increased wrath to unbelievers*. It is not possible for the gospel to be without some effect. If it be a savour of life unto life to those who receive it, it must of necessity from its own intrinsic vigour be a savour of death unto death to those who reject it. To this sword there are two edges—one will kill our fears, or the other will surely kill our pride and destroy our vain hopes if we yield not to Christ. You may, perhaps, have noticed that when our Lord read this passage at Nazareth, he stopped short, he did not read it all; he read as far down as, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," and then he closed the book and gave it to the minister and sat down. I suppose that at the commencement of his ministry, before he had been rejected by the nation, and before he had suffered for sin, he wisely chose to allude to the gentler topics rather than to those more stern and terrible ones; but he did not conclude his ministry without referring to the stern words which followed those which he had read. If you will turn to Luke's twenty-first chapter you will find him saying in the twenty-first and twenty-second verses, "Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." You know the story of the siege of Jerusalem, the most harrowing of all narratives, for the anger of God was concentrated upon that wicked city beyond all precedent. It was because they rejected Christ that vengeance came upon them. They filled up the measure of their iniquity when at last they disowned their king and cried out, "Away with him, away with him, let him be crucified." Mark you then, dear hearer, that if you have heard the gospel and rejected it, you have incurred great guilt, and you can never sin so cheaply as you did before; for you there

will be a day of vengeance above the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, because you have perpetrated a crime which they were not capable of committing—you have rejected the Christ of God. The year of acceptance to believers will be a day of vengeance to those who obey not his gospel.

Another meaning of the text comes out in the fact that *there is appointed a day of vengeance for all the enemies of Christ*, and this will happen in that bright future day for which we are looking. Not merely for rejecters of his gospel will there be vengeance, but for all men and fallen spirits who dare to oppose his sway. Behold he comes a second time; every winged hour hastens his advent, and when he comes it will be a great and a dreadful day to his foes. It will be to his saints the day of their revelation, manifestation, and acceptance, but to the ungodly "the day of vengeance of our God." "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Paul also bears witness the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." Note the vengeance and the grace combined. The prophet Isaiah saw our great champion returning from his last fight, and thus spake concerning him: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." Observe, again, the connection between the day of vengeance and the year of the redeemed. At the second advent Christ will come to be glorified in his saints, and they shall be manifested in the fulness of their acceptance, but it will be an overwhelming day of vengeance for all those who have hardened their hearts and continued in their sins. "Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

However, I consider that the chief meaning of the text lies in this—that "*the day of vengeance of our God*" *was that day when he made all the transgressions of his people to meet upon the head of our great Surety*. Sin with many streams had been flowing down the hills of time and forming by their dread accumulation one vast and fathomless lake. Into this the sinner's substitute must be plunged. He had a baptism to be

baptized with and he must endure it, or all his chosen must perish for ever. That was a day of vengeance when all the waves and billows of divine wrath went over his innocent head.

"Came at length the dreadful night ;
Vengeance with its iron rod
Stood, and with collected might
Bruised the harmless Lamb of God.
See, my soul, thy Saviour see,
Prostrate in Gethsemane !"

From his blessed person there distilled a bloody sweat, for his soul was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death. All through the night with scourgings and buffetings and spittings of cruel men, he was tortured and abused ; he was rejected, despised, maltreated, and pierced in his inmost soul by man's scorn and cruelty. Then in the morning he was taken out to be crucified, for nothing could suffice short of his death. The outward sorrows of crucifixion ye know, but the inward griefs ye do not know, for what our Lord endured was beyond what any mortal man could have borne. The infinity of the Godhead aided the manhood, and I doubt not Hart was right in saying that he

"Bore all Incarnate God could bear
With strength enough but none to spare."

It was an awful "day of vengeance of our God," for the voice cried aloud, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." The doctrine that justice was executed upon our great Substitute is the most important that was ever propounded in the hearing of men ; it is the sum and substance of the whole gospel, and I fear that the church which rejects it is no longer a church of Christ. Substitution is as much a standing or falling article in the church as the doctrine of justification by faith itself. My brethren and sisters, there would never have been an acceptable year if there had not been a day of vengeance. Be ye sure of this.

And now let us look at the instructive type by which this truth was taught to Israel of old. The year of jubilee began with the day of atonement. "Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land." What did the high priest do on that day ? Read for yourselves the seventeenth chapter of Leviticus. On that day he washed himself and came forth before the people, not wearing his breast-plate, nor his garments of glory and beauty, of blue and scarlet and fine linen ; but the high priest wore the ordinary linen garments of a common priest. Even thus the Lord, who counted it not robbery to be equal with God, laid aside all his glory, and was found in fashion as a man. Then the priest took a bullock and, having offered it, went within the veil with the censer full of burning coals of fire, and sweet incense beaten small, with which he filled the inner court with perfumed smoke. After this he took the blood of the bullock and sprinkled it before the mercy-seat seven times. Thus our Lord entered within the veil with his own blood and with the sweet incense of his own merits, to make atonement for us. Of the two goats, one was killed as a sin-offering, and his blood was sprinkled within the veil, and the other was used for a scapegoat. Upon the head of the scapegoat Aaron laid

both his hands, and confessed all the iniquities of the children of Israel, "putting them upon the head of the goat," which was then taken into the wilderness as the type of the carrying away of sin into oblivion. Do you not see your Lord and Master bearing your sin away? "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Is there any wonder that a jubilee of peace should follow such a taking away of iniquity as our great High-priest has accomplished? Jesus is entered into the heavens for us, can we doubt of our acceptance with God?

The bodies of the beasts whose blood was brought into the sanctuary for sin on the day of atonement were not suffered to remain in the holy place, but were carried forth without the camp to be utterly consumed with fire, in token that sin is loathsome in the sight of God, and must be put away from his presence. Even thus did our Lord suffer without the gate and cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." All this was absolutely needful to a jubilee. Without atonement, no rejoicing. Before there can be acceptance for a single sinner, sin must be laid on Jesus and carried away. The blood of Jesus must be shed, and must be presented within the veil, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin;" for no man living under heaven can there be pardon or acceptance with God in any way but by the bloody sacrifice which our Redeemer offered when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost on Calvary. This great truth we must never becloud, nor ever cease to publish so long as we have a tongue to move.

The day of vengeance then is intimately connected with the year of acceptance; and mark, beloved, *they must be so connected experimentally in the heart of all God's people by the teaching of the Holy Ghost*, for whenever Christ comes to make us live, the law comes first to kill us. There is no healing without previous wounding. Depend upon it, there never will be a sense of acceptance in any man until first he has had a sense of the just and righteous vengeance of God against his sin. Have you noticed that remarkable parallel to our text in the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, where salvation and vengeance are so closely joined. There we read in the third verse and onward, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." O poor trembling convinced sinner, God has come with vengeance to you, but his intent is to save you. Every soul that is saved must feel that wrath is deserved and that the death punishment is due on account of sin, and when this is known and felt acceptance by faith will follow. There must be a death blow struck at all self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, and the man must be laid as dead at the feet of Christ before ever he will look up and find life and healing in the great atoning sacrifice. When our Lord puts on the helmet of salvation, he also girds about him the garments of vengeance, and we must see him in all his array. (See Isaiah lix. 17.) The day

of vengeance is a needful companion to the year of acceptance ; have they gone together in your experience ?

III. I wish time would occasionally stay his rapid flight, or at least allow us to pluck a feather from his wing while we contemplate such a subject as this. But I must close with the third head, namely, THE COMFORT FOR MOURNERS DERIVABLE FROM BOTH THESE THINGS. "*To comfort all that mourn.*"

Now, I have no hope of interesting, much less of doing any good to, any in this house of prayer who do not come under the description of mourners. The sower's duty is to sow the seed everywhere, but he knows within himself that it will take no root anywhere except where the plough has been first at work. If the Lord has made thee a mourner then the blessed subject of this morning will comfort thee ; but the Lord never comforts those who do not want comfort. If you can save yourself, go and do it : if you are righteous, "he that is righteous let him be righteous still." I say it in sarcasm, as you perceive, for you cannot save yourself, nor are you righteous ; but if you think so, go your way and try it—vainly try it, for surely when you have fanned your best works into a flame, and have walked by the light of the sparks of the fire which you have kindled, you shall have this at the Lord's hands—you shall lie down in sorrow and be astonished that you were ever so mad as to dream of self-salvation or of justification by your own works.

But oh, ye mourners, what joy is here, joy because this is the year of acceptance, and in the year of acceptance, or jubilee, men were set free and their lands were restored without money. No man ever paid a penny of redemption money on the jubilee morning : every man was free *simply because jubilee was proclaimed* : no merit was demanded, no demur was offered, no delay allowed, no dispute permitted. Jubilee came, and the bondman was free. And now, to-day, whosoever believeth in Jesus is saved, pardoned, freed, without money, without merit, without preparation, simply because he believeth, and God declareth that he that believeth is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. Dost thou believe ? Then art thou of the house of Israel, and thou hast God's warrant for it, thou art free. Rejoice in thy liberty ! Surely this is sweet comfort for all that mourn. Look not for any marks and evidences, signs and tokens, look not for any merits or attainments, look not for any progress in grace or advancement in piety as a ground of salvation ; listen only to the proclamation of the gospel, and accept the divine decree which ordains a jubilee. Art thou but of the chosen seed, dost thou believe in Jesus, then for thee it is an accepted year. Come, bring hither thy griefs and sorrows, and leave them at the cross, for the Lord accepts thee, and who shall say thee nay ?

An equal joy-note however rings out from the other sentence concerning the day of vengeance. If the day of vengeance took place when our Lord died, then it is over. The day of vengeance was past and gone eighteen hundred years ago and more.

"Now no more His wrath we dread,
Vengeance smote our Surety's head ;
Legal claims are fully met,
Jesus paid the dreadful debt."

My heart, dost thou bleed for sin and mourn because of it? Be it so; but it has ceased to be, for Christ made an end of it when he took it up to his cross and bore it there in his own body on the tree. O believer, art thou bowed down and troubled on account of past sin? It is right thou shouldst repent, but still remember thy past sin exists no more, the pen is drawn through it and it is cancelled, for the day of vengeance is over. God will not twice take vengeance for the same sin. Either the atonement which Jesus offered was enough, or it was not; if it was not, then woe be to us, for we shall die; but if it was sufficient—if “It is finished” was not a lie but a truth, then he hath “finished transgression and made an end of sin.” The sin of the believer is annihilated and abolished, and can never be laid to his charge. Let us rejoice that the day of vengeance is over, and the year of acceptance has begun.

In another sense, however, it may be that some are mourning because of the temptations of Satan. Here, too, they may be comforted, for Jesus has come to take vengeance on the evil one, and the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Are you afraid of death? Behold Christ has taken revenge on death, for he bids you cry, because of his resurrection, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Are we mourning to-day because our dear ones are not converted? It is a good thing to mourn on that account, but let us take comfort, for this is an acceptable year; let us pray for them, and the Lord will save them. Are we mourning because sin is rampant in the wide world? Let us rejoice, for our Lord has broken the dragon’s head, and the day of vengeance must come when the Lord will overthrow the powers of darkness. Have we been looking with mournful spirit upon old Rome, and the Mohammedan imposture, and the power of Buddhism and Brahminism and other the sway of ancient idolatries? Let us be glad. Behold the Avenger cometh! He comes a second time, and comes conquering and to conquer. Then shall the day of his vengeance be in his heart, and the year of his redeemed shall come. From the seven hills the deceiver shall be torn, no more to curse the sons of men with his pretensions to be the vicar of God. In blackest night shall set for ever the crescent of Mohammed, which already wanes; its baleful light shall no more afflict unhappy nations. Then shall fall the gods of the Hindoos and the Chinese, broken like potters’ vessels by the rod of iron which Jesus wields. At his appearing the whole earth shall acknowledge that he who was “despised and rejected of men” is “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Behold, the day cometh on apace, let all that mourn be comforted. The day of vengeance, the full year of the millennial glory, the day of the overthrow of error, the year of the acceptance of creation in all her former beauty, the age when God shall be all in all, is near at hand. Hasten it, O Lord. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Leviticus xvi. 29—34,
and Leviticus xxv. 1—24: 39—43.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—289, 271, 299.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SHEEP AMONG WOLVES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 19TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."—Matthew x. 16.

WELL may the text begin with a "Behold," for it contains some special wonders, such as can be seen nowhere else. First, here is a tender and loving Shepherd sending his sheep into the most dangerous position—"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." It is the part of a shepherd to protect his sheep from the wolves, not to send them into the very midst of those ravenous beasts; and yet here is the Good Shepherd, "that Great Shepherd of the sheep," actually undertaking and carrying out this extraordinary experiment of conducting his sheep into the very midst of wolves. How strange it seems to poor carnal sense. Be astonished, but be not unbelieving—stand still awhile and study the reason.

The next remarkable thing is "sheep in the midst of wolves," because according to the order of nature such a thing is never seen, but, on the other hand, it has been reckoned a great calamity that in some lands wolves are too often seen in the midst of sheep. The wolf leaps into the midst of a flock and rends and tears on every side; it matters not how many the sheep may be, for one wolf is more than a match for a thousand sheep. But lo! here you see sheep sent forth among the wolves, as if they were the attacking party, and were bent upon putting down their terrible enemies. It is a novel sight, such as nature can never show, but grace is full of marvels.

Equally extraordinary is the singular mixture, never yet seen by human eye amongst beasts and birds—a mixture of the serpent with the dove in one person. What a strange blending. Creatures which are capable of cross-breeding must have some sort of kinship; but here is a reptile of the dust united with a bird of the air—"Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Grace knows how to pick the good out of the evil, the jewel out of the oyster shell, the diamond from the dunghill, the sagacity from the serpent; and by a divine chemistry it leaves the good

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which it takes out of the foul place as good as though it had never been there. Grace knows how to blend the most gentle with the most subtle; to take away from prudence the base element which makes it into cunning, and, by mingling innocence with it, produce a sacred prudence most valuable for all walks of life.

With these three wonders outside the text, lying, as it were, upon the very surface, we shall enter into a fuller consideration of it with great expectations; but if we do so we shall be disappointed if we expect to learn anything very extraordinary unless we are prepared to practise what we learn. I may truly say of this text, he that doeth its bidding shall understand its doctrine: he who followeth its precept shall best know its meaning. May the Spirit of all grace work in us according to his divine power, and perfect in us the will of the Lord.

Though primarily addressed to the apostles, it seems to me that our text relates in its measure to all who have any talent or ability for spreading the gospel, and indeed to all the saints so far as they are true to their calling as the children of God. They are all of them more or less as sheep in the midst of wolves, and to them all is the advice given, "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Let us hear for ourselves as though the Lord Jesus spoke to us each individually.

We may see in the text four things concerning the people of God. First, *their prominent vocation*—"Behold, I send you forth"; secondly, *their imminent peril*—"as sheep in the midst of wolves"; thirdly, *their eminent authority*—"Behold, I send you forth"; and, lastly, *their permanent instructions*—"Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

I. First, let us consider THEIR PROMINENT VOCATION. They had other callings, for some of them were fishermen; but their great calling was this—"Behold, I send you forth." The call of the Lord over-rides all other vocations. Every child of God, according to the capacity of grace which God has given to him, should hear this voice of the Lord calling him and sending him forth to labour—"Behold, I send you forth."

These disciples had been with him, and *had been taught by him, that they might teach in his name*. They had for some little time been his disciples or learners, and now he calls them apart from the rest, and says, "I send you forth to teach and to make disciples." The mode of operation in the kingdom of God is, first make disciples, baptize them, teach them whatsoever the Lord has commanded, and then let them go forth and do the same with others. When one light is kindled other candles are lit therefrom. Drops of heavenly water are flashed aloft and scattered all around like dew upon the face of the earth, and behold each one begetteth a fountain, where it falls, and thus the desert is made to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Do not try to teach till the Lord Jesus has first taught you: do not pretend to instruct till you have been instructed. Sit at Christ's feet before you speak in Christ's name, but when once you are instructed do not fail to become teachers. The lessons of your Lord will be impressed upon your own minds the more forcibly and indelibly when you have earnestly communicated them to your fellow men. First be taught, but afterwards fail not to teach. Hoard not up the treasure of divine knowledge, for there is no stint therein: eat not alone the honey of redeeming love, for there is enough and to spare. Feed not upon the

bread of heaven with selfish greed, as though there were a famine in the land and you had need to save each crumb for yourself, but break your bread among the hungry crowd about you, and it shall multiply in your hand. Christ has called you that you may afterwards go forth and call others to his sacred feast of grace.

Our Lord called them not only to teach those that came in their way, but *to go after the lost sheep*. "Behold," he says, "I send you forth." Some persons will hardly teach those who come immediately to their doors. Living under your own roof, with some of you, there are neglected souls. Even in some professedly Christian families there are sons and daughters who are not being trained for holiness nor taught in the way of everlasting life. This is sad to the last degree. Friend, do you fail there? Let conscience be awake to judge. Your Master supposes that you have fulfilled home duties, and then he calls you forth to attempt something further. "Go your ways," saith he, for "I send you forth." You have been sitting and hearing the gospel, leave your seats at times and go forth to bring others to the faith. You have the power of the word upon your hearts, now go and show its power upon your lips by speaking to others, however few or many. Go out yourselves as sowers, and scatter the seed your Lord has given to you for that end. Go where providence guides you, to the Sunday-school class to teach, to the street corner to preach, to the remote village or hamlet to bear witness for Christ, or to the densely crowded city slums to uplift the banner of Christ; but go your way somewhere. Sit not down in idleness and fold your arms in indifference to the world's woes. Behold, your compassionate Lord sends you, therefore go gladly anywhere, everywhere,—where his wisdom appoints the way—where your business gives you opportunity, or your travelling gives you occasion. "I send you forth," saith he.

He sent them forth, we are told, *to work miracles* as well as to preach. Now, he hath not given us this power, neither do we desire it: it is more to God's glory that the world should be conquered by the force of truth than by the blaze of miracles. The miracles were the great bell of the universe which was rung in order to call the attention of all men all over the world to the fact that the gospel feast was spread: we do not need the bell now, for the thousands who have feasted to the full are the best announcers of the banquet. Those of us who have fed upon Christ and his salvation will make the matter known wherever we go, and no further announcement by miracle will be required, save only the standing miracle of the indwelling Spirit.

We have now the great advantages of rapid travelling and of the printing press, so that we need not now the gift of tongues, since men can so much more readily learn a foreign language than they could before, and so much more quickly travel to the spot. For the moral and spiritual forces of truth to work by themselves, apart from any physical manifestation, is more to the glory of the truth, and the Christ of the truth, than if we were all miracle workers, and could destroy gainsayers. Yet still, though we work no miracles in the physical world, we work them in the moral and spiritual world, ay, and the same miracles too; for, behold, he has sent us forth to heal the sick, as the evangelist has it in the eighth verse of the chapter before us. Those who are depressed in spirit, faint and feeble, broken-hearted and desponding, bruised and

mangled by the assaults of the great enemy,—we are to go forth and pour in the oil and wine of the gospel, apply the heavenly plaster of the promise, and bind up with sacred liniment of consoling doctrine, and everywhere bring before sin-sick sinners the matchless medicine of the precious blood of Christ. For every spiritual disease the gospel is the sure remedy, and we are to carry it to every land. "Heal the sick." This also we do. Such sicknesses as laugh at the physician, and cannot be touched by mortal skill, are healed by the servants of him who came himself to bear human sicknesses that he might bear them away. Go forth, ye servants of God, with a better balm than that of Gilead; sit not still in idleness while bleeding hearts and sickening souls are all around you. Men are perishing; go forth to heal them.

You are also to "cleanse the lepers." There is a leprosy abroad in the world which takes different shapes in different ages, but is the same both in its cause and effect. In our land we see on all hands the foul leprosy of drunkenness, that brutish disease which degrades and destroys men's souls; there is the leprosy of superstition, which eats into the understanding and makes a man a fool; and, alas, there is the white leprosy of scepticism, which like an inward fire consumes the very heart. Sin is this leprosy, and our business is, as God shall help us, by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to make these lepers clean. It is to be done. It is done by us now in our Lord's name. He that worketh in us mightily will cause the Word to be mighty to this end also, that the leprosy may depart from men and that they may come into the congregation of the Lord.

He bids us also raise the dead, which seems the sternest work of all; but as the others are impossible to us apart from him, this is not more difficult than the rest. We are to "raise the dead." Our gospel begins with men where they are by nature, and does not wait till they come part of the way. We go forth to preach to those who are careless and insensible, to those who have no feeling whatsoever, and are furthest gone from any tenderness of heart with regard to their own sin or the love of God. Go ye with the gospel to the sepulchre of vice and preach to the dead in sin. The gospel has a quickening power, beloved, and Jesus who is the resurrection and the life sends you forth, that by his word in your mouths dead souls may be raised. None are too stolid to be aroused, too hardened to be renewed.

And then he adds, "Cast out devils." This commission he gave to his apostles, and in a spiritual sense to us too. The devil and his myrmidons reign over the hearts of men, subjecting them to sin and unbelief. Behold they claim this world as their dominion, but it is not so, they are usurpers, for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. Go ye with the truth and cast out the demon of error; go ye with the glad tidings of joy and cast out the demon of despair; go ye with the message of peace and cast out the demon of war; go ye with the word of holiness and cast out the demons of iniquity; go with the gospel of liberty and cast out the demons of tyranny. These blessed deeds can be done and shall be done, God being with you, and to this end he bids you go in his name, for he will gird you with his strength.

Now, when I say that every Christian according to his ability is called to do this, I mean precisely what I say. I mean that Christian men

nowadays while they should be attached to the church to which they belong, and the more intense that attachment the better for a thousand reasons, yet they should not regard the church as being a peaceful dormitory where they are all to sleep, but a common barracks where they are all to be trained, and out of which they are to issue and carry on the sacred crusade for Christ. We are not to be frozen together with the compactness of a mass of ice, through mere agreement of creed, but welded together like bars of iron by the fire of a common purpose and a common zeal. If we are what we should be, we shall be continually breaking forth on the right hand and on the left: each man, each woman, according to the calling that God has given to us, we shall be seeking to extend the Redeemer's kingdom in all directions. My dear brethren, ye are arrows in the quiver, how gladly would I see you shot forth upon the enemy from the bow of the Lord. Many of you are as battleaxes and weapons of war hanging on the wall. O that you may be taken down and used of the Lord in his glorious fight. Lo, on the walls of Zion hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men; but the great need of the age is that these weapons be removed from their resting and rusting, and carried into the thick of the fray. May the Lord send *you* forth, O ye who have been saved under my ministry! May he hurl *you* forth with power divine, like a mighty hail against his adversaries. May each man among you be eager to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints and to save souls from going down into the pit. Here, then, is your permanent vocation, try to realize it.

II. Secondly, we shall consider **THEIR IMMINENT PERIL.** "*I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves;*" that is to say, the task is one of great danger and difficulty. Our divine enterprise is no child's play. The work has its charms; it looks very pretty upon paper and sounds well when eloquently described. At missionary meetings and revival services it stirs your blood to hear of what is to be done, and you resolve to rush upon it at once; but while we would not check the ardour of one eager aspirant, we would have him count the cost and know what the warfare is. Enlist by all means, but stop a bit, and know what you are doing, lest you quit the field as hurriedly as you entered it, and bring disgrace both on yourselves and the cause. Old soldiers who know the smell of gunpowder, talk not so lightly of a battle as the raw recruits may do; they remember the blood and fire and vapour of smoke, and, though they are not timid, they are very serious. Come ye who have never thought about it, and look upon that which will dishearten every man who is a coward, and test the brave as to whether their courage is that of nature or of grace.

You are to go forth as sheep among wolves, that is to say, you have to go *among those who will not in any way sympathize with your efforts.* Sometimes we go among amiable, quiet, almost persuaded people, and it is somewhat pleasant work, though even there it is very discouraging, for those who are not far from the kingdom are often the hardest to be won. Borderers are a difficult sort of people to deal with, and for real success one may as well go among the decidedly ungodly at once. If you discharge your souls and behave zealously before God, you will have to deal with people who cannot enter into your feelings or agree with your aims. The bleating sheep finds no harmony in the bark or howl of the wolf:

the two are very different animals, and by no means agree. You do not suppose that you are going to be received with open arms by everybody, do you? And if you become a preacher of the gospel you do not imagine that you are going to please people, do you? The time may come when perhaps the wolves will find it most for their own comfort not to howl quite so loudly, but my own experience goes to show that they howl pretty loudly when you first come among them, and they keep up the hideous concert year after year, until at last they somewhat weary of their useless noise. The world doth raven as a wolf if any man be in double earnest for the kingdom of Christ. Well, you must bear with it. What sort of sympathy can a lamb expect from wolves? If he expected any would he be not disappointed? Be not you disappointed, for you know your surroundings, and you know your mission. When our Saviour used similar words to the seventy, he did not call them sheep, but lambs, (see Luke x. 3), for they were not so far advanced as the twelve, yet did he send them into the same trying circumstances, and they returned in peace. Even the weak ones among us should therefore be of good courage and be ready to face opposition and ridicule.

Sheep in the midst of wolves are *among those who would rend them*, tear them, devour them. Luther used to say, Cain will go on killing Abel to the world's end, if he can, and so he will till that millennial day when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb. The disposition and nature of the wolves cause them to be opposed to the sheep, and it is the nature of the world to hate the children of God. All along through history you see the two seeds in contention; if there is Abel there is Cain who slays him; if there is Noah, you see an ungodly world all round him; if there be an Isaac, so also is there an Ishmael who will mock him; and if there be a Jacob there is an Esau who seeks to kill him. There cannot be an Israel without Pharaoh, or Amalek, or Edom, or Babylon to oppose. David must be hunted by Saul, and the Son of David by Herod. There is an enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, and that enmity will always remain. The ungodly roar upon the righteous, and seek to bring cruel accusations against them, even as against their Lord. No matter how pure the lives of the godly, the wicked will slander them; no matter how kind their actions, they will render evil in return; no matter how plain and honest their behaviour, they will suspect them; and no matter how disinterested in their motives, they will be sure to attribute to them the very meanest designs, for the wolf cometh to kill and to devour, and he will do it to the best of his ability. Ah, how red are his fangs in times of persecution. How the wolf raged and raved over this our country in the days of Mary and Charles the Second, and afterwards when, first as a Protestant, and next as a Puritan, the godly were devoured, and he that followed his conscience was made bitterly to suffer. Scotland can tell how the wolf's fangs were wet with the blood of her covenanting sons; and were it not for God's own strong hand put upon them the wolves would be tearing the sheep to this day in our own land.

Again, they were to go like sheep among wolves, among a people *who would hinder their endeavours*; for their business was to seek the lost sheep, and the wolves would not help them in that, on the contrary,

he wolves themselves desire to seize upon the lost sheep as their prey. You must expect, if you are faithful to Christ and put forth zealous efforts, that there will be others who will put forth their strength and cunning to oppose you. It is often an awful game that we have to play for a man's soul. Each move we make is met by the devil, and unless God directs us we shall lose the man. If we draw him to the prayer-meeting, another takes him to the theatre; if we set before him the truth, another puzzles him with scepticism; if we persuade him, others entice him in the wrong direction: the cunning of our foe is something terrible. We go forth to hunt for precious souls, but there are others who in another sense hunt for the precious life. The streets at night tell of those whom Satan hires that he may use them as his decoys, and the vicious literature scattered abroad so plentifully, are other forms of the nets of Satan, the great fowler, who catches the sons of men in his snares. If we are not earnest the devil is: he never sleeps; he lost his eyelids long ago. We may slumber if we dare, but the powers of evil will never suspend their activities: day and night the deadly work goes on, and the wolves howl over their prey. Therefore go we forth like sheep, not among the images of wolves, but in the midst of real active wolves, that are doing all they possibly can to destroy those sheep who are as yet lost, but whom Christ has nevertheless purchased with his precious blood.

We are to go forth like sheep among wolves in this sense, that we *are quite powerless against them*. What can a sheep do if a wolf sets upon it? It has no strength to resist; and so those seventy disciples of Christ, if the Jews had hunted them down, must have gone to prison and to death, for they could not fight. "My kingdom," said our Lord, "is not of this world, else would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." All through the history of the church when the wolves actually set upon the sheep they make no active resistance, but as the flock of slaughter they suffer and die. I know there was a time in history when the sheep began fighting, but it was not their Master's mind that they should: he bids us put up our sword into its scabbard. Our place is to bear and bear and bear continually, as he did. He saith, "If a man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Fighting sheep are strange animals, and fighting Christians are self-evident contradictions. They have forsaken the Master's way: they have gone off from the platform whereon he standeth whenever it comes to the carnal weapon. It is ours still to submit, and to be the anvil which bears the blows, but outlasts all the hammers. After all, the wolves have had by far the worst of it; the sheep are multiplied and the wolves grow fewer and fewer. As a matter of fact the sheep have lived in this country to see the last of the wolves, and they will in other lands. The wild dogs of Australia are very fierce against the sheep, but the sheep will surely in the end live, and the wild dog will die. Everywhere it is so. They are weak in themselves, and yet they conquer the strong. "Ah," you say, "it is the shepherd who gives them this victory." Precisely so, and that is where our strength also lieth, even in "that great Shepherd of the sheep." Though called to bow down as the street that men may go over us, by this endurance we conquer: in suffering we are invincible, and ever still in this sign we

conquer—the cross of self-denial and self-sacrifice leads the way. “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves,” not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing; being provoked, ye return gentleness; and being persecuted, ye pray for your enemies. “Ah,” saith one, “I do not like the look of such a mode of warfare.” I thought you would not, and you may go your way. As notice was given of old in the camp of Israel that he who had lately married a wife, or builded a house, or was fainthearted, might go home, so do we say,—To your beds, ye cowards! if ye cannot undertake this for your Master, he does not need that his host should be encumbered by your presence. Our Master calls out men to whom he giveth grace, that they may be strong to endure even unto the end. The Spirit of the Lord giveth patience and forbearance to those who in true faith seek to be like their suffering Lord.

Brethren, it is *trying* work for the sheep to go forth among wolves, but it has to be done. Picture it in your mind's eye. The timid sheep trembles at it. The wolves are rough, unmannerly, coarse-minded, irritating, annoying: the poor sheep does not feel at home in such company. He sees every now and then the white teeth glittering within the wolf's mouth, and he is ill at ease. The sheep wishes he were back again in the quiet fold among his happy brethren; but the Shepherd knows what he is at, and it is the duty of the sheep to obey, and to go into the midst of the wolves if his Shepherd bids him.

It is very *testing*, too, because if a man be not truly one of God's own he will not obey so trying a command, but will neglect duty and seek comfort. It will try even you who are most sincere. You think you have much patience: get among the wolves and see how much is left. You fancy you could put up with a great deal of annoyance; let it come upon you and you will see how it torments you. When it comes to the loss of your good name, to downright lying and slander against the tenderest part of your character, when it comes to bitter sneers and sarcasms, and words which eat like acid into the flesh and burn like coals of fire flung into the bosom, it is not easy then to maintain the love which hopeth all things, endureth all things. Grace alone makes believers press forward in their work of love, seeking with gentleness to win souls. Oh to say,—though the wicked man curse me, and foam at the mouth with rage, I will still seek his good. This is the victory of faith, but the battle will test all your graces, and make you see that all is not gold which glitters. You will soon see whether the Spirit of God be in you or not, for patient love is not natural, but supernatural, and only he who is filled with the supernatural indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be able to live as a sheep among wolves.

If you can accomplish this work it will be very *teaching* to you. You will never know why Christ wept over Jerusalem till you get among the Jerusalemites, and painfully feel the cruel wrongs which make men weep because they love. You cannot understand the Saviour's death throes, the bloody sweat, the heaviness even unto death, and the broken heart, unless you go like a sheep into the midst of wolves: then you will be where Jesus was, and you will have fellowship with him. Practical learning is best—books cannot teach us fellowship with our Lord, but when we get to do Christly work then we come to mourn the evil which he lamented and prize the remedy which he supplied.

Thus we gather knowledge, and are ourselves the better for our labour for others.

III. Let us now look at God's servants sent forth, and note **THEIR EMINENT AUTHORITY**, "*Behold I send you forth.*" What a grand expression! It could be used by no mere man. He who spake thus is divine. Brothers and sisters, our commission justifies us in what we do. For a sheep to go into the midst of wolves of its own accord would be a foolish courting of peril, but when the great Shepherd says, "I send you," it would be a grievous fault to linger. Who is this who says "I send you"? First, it is "*The Lord of the harvest.*" Did you notice while we were reading in the tenth of Luke, how the two verses ran on, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you." The same connection is here, only there is a little parenthesis; read the last verse of the ninth chapter of Matthew, and you will see that it is the same. It is the Lord of the harvest to whom we pray, who actually sends us forth in answer to our own prayers. He is the Master of all worlds, and owner of the souls of men. He puts his sickle into your hand and bids you go forth and reap the golden grain which is the reward of the travail of his soul. "I send you,"—the Lord of the harvest. Armed with this authority, who shall daunt you? Go even to the gates of hell if Jesus commands.

Next, "I send you"—*I who prize you*, for you are my sheep, I who love you, for I bought you with my blood; I, who would not expose you to a needless danger, I who know by my infinite wisdom that I am doing a wise and a kind thing, I send you, you my sheep, my dear sheep, for whom I laid down my life,—I send you into the midst of wolves, therefore you may safely go, for I who love you send you there. Lord, we ask no questions, but we go at once.

"I send you," that is, *I who have gone on the same errand myself*. Did he not come into the world like a sheep in the midst of wolves? Remember with what patience he endured, and with what glory he triumphed; recollect his poverty and shame and death: remember how like a sheep before her shearers he was dumb, like a lamb that is taken to the slaughter he opened not his mouth. He does not bid you go where he has not gone himself. It is dangerous, but then he has passed through the danger, endured it, and triumphed in it.

"I send you"—mark that,—*I who overcame in the very character in which I send you*. Have you not read in the book of the Revelation, "The Lamb shall overcome them;" and again, "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb:" and know ye not that heaven's high songs go up to him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever? The Lamb in the midst of wolves has conquered the wolves, and is Lord of all; and so he in effect says, "You are my lambs; therefore go forth, as I did; endure, as I did; conquer, as I did; and you shall sit on my throne, and the Lamb shall lead you to the living fountains of water."

IV. We close by noticing **THEIR PERMANENT INSTRUCTIONS**. You have a tough task before you, to act as sheep among wolves. Your Lord leaves you not without guidance in the form of plain precept. What are you to do, then? Be bold as lions? Yes, but that is not the principal

thing. Be swift as eagles? Yes, by all means, but that is not the main requirement. For everyday life, for the wear and tear of this great battle, there are two grand requisites; the first is prudence,—be wise as serpents; and the next thing is innocence,—be harmless as doves.

First, *be prudent and wise as a serpent*. Do not imitate a serpent in any other respect but in this only. Never let the devil enter into you as he did into the serpent, nor become grovelling and cunning. But, still, the serpent is an exceeding wise creature, and it had need to be, for it lives in a world where it is hated by a deadly foe. It is natural to man to hate the whole serpent tribe. The very first thing you do if you see a viper is to look for a stick to kill it. Everybody is the enemy of serpents, and if they are to exist at all they must be very wary: in this you are to copy them. What does a serpent do to preserve itself? What is it which proves its wisdom? First, *it gets out of the way of man as much as it can*. Our Lord meant this, for immediately after our text he says, "But beware of men." It is well to get out of the society of ungodly men, and let them see that their habits and modes of conversation are not ours. Seek to benefit them, but do not seek their society. Their wolfish propensities are most seen in their leisure time, in their drinking and revelling, therefore keep far from these. You have no business in their gay parties, their frivolous assemblies, their drinking bouts and places of lascivious song. Do not accept their invitations when you know that they will be under no restraint; do not linger near them when they are talking lewdly or profanely; your moving off will be your most telling protest. You must be with them in your business—indeed, you are sent to them, but while you are *with* them you must not be *of* them; and you should discreetly avoid them when you know that you can do no good. You younger ones should get out of the way of old blasphemers and scoffers as much as you ever can, for they delight to worry the lambs. Do not attempt to answer them, but keep out of their way.

Do not court quarrelling and controversy, but avoid all disputing upon the gospel. Your workmates will chaff you, and no doubt you will receive many opprobrious epithets, but neither provoke this treatment nor resent it in any way. Do not cast pearls before swine, and do not introduce religion at unseasonable times; hold your principles very firmly, but when you know a man will only blaspheme if he hears you name the name of Jesus, do not give him the occasion. Stand up for Jesus when the time is fit, but do not exercise zeal without knowledge. When a man is half drunk, or in a passion, leave him to himself, and thus escape many a brawl. At another opportunity, when the occasion is more favourable, then endeavour to instruct and persuade, but not when failure is certain. Be very prudent, and hold your peace when silence is better than speech.

How else does the serpent act? *It glides along very quietly*. It can hiss, but it does not very often do so. As it glides along it neither sings, nor roars, nor barks; it does not court observation; it slips off quietly, gracefully, swiftly, and without noise. Now, do not seek after great publicity. There may be times when it may be well to ring the great bell. If you can get multitudes of people together to hear the gospel by all means ring the bell as loudly as you can;

out as far as you are personally concerned do not make a fuss, do not blazon abroad what you are going to do ; do not call upon everybody, saying, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts." Glide along through a useful life as quietly as the serpent which does what he finds to do and says nothing, dreading rather than courting the eye of man. Unobtrusive earnestness, quiet, simple-minded resolution to achieve your purpose, whether men will bear or whether they will forbear, whether they will praise, or whether they will gainsay,—this is your wisdom.

Then, again, the serpent is famous for *finding his way where no other creature could enter* : any little interstice, any tiny opening, will be sufficient for his purpose. His form is adapted to progress among obstacles. You may block the way to other creatures, but he will wriggle in somehow. So should it be with us. If we cannot get at men's hearts one way we must try another. If you cannot induce them to read the gospel, get them to hear it ; if you cannot induce them to hear a sermon, drop a verse into their ears ; if a tract is refused, put a word in edgeways for your Lord and Master. There is a way into everyone's heart if you know how to find it : be wise as serpents and discover it. Though it seems very difficult to reach some minds, yet with holy perseverance and serpentine adroitness continue the attempt, and you will succeed. There is a weak point in the strongest man's mind, where his opposition can be wounded. Even Leviathan that laugheth at the spear hath a tender place where the spear's point may come at him ; and so the most ungodly, wicked, blaspheming, profane infidel has some point where you may reach his better feelings if you do but search it out. Be wise as serpents in this respect.

But then you are to add to this, which might otherwise degenerate into cunning, *the innocence of the dove*. The Greek for harmless is "without horn." The dove is without horn, hoof, fang, or other means of defence. You are to have positively no weapon : like the dove, you are to be defenceless. It seems a singular thing to set doves flying at eagles, and lambs at war with wolves, but this is what the Lord has done. This defencelessness, however, which looks like our weakness, is our real strength. Our being harmless appears to predict sure destruction, but it is to be the means of certain victory. You are to be gentle, and easily entreated ; you are not to fly into a passion because you are contradicted, nor to be angry because you are reviled. You are to endure contradiction and slander with tenderness and gentleness, as a dove bears all things. You are not to be driven into any sin by opposition. The dove is pure ; it loveth to be by the rivers of waters, in the quiet and clean places. So do you never be driven to sinful word or deed, but do good to all men, and glorify God in all things, by being both gentle and pure as a dove. And as the dove is very simple and is altogether artless and unworldly, so let your strength and your wisdom lie in your artless truthfulness and childlike dependence upon God. See how Christ explains his own utterance a little further down. "Harmless as doves," then he adds, "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak." Be like a dove, confident because fearless, gentle, artless, simple, and restful. Do no ill, and fear none. You Christian people, if you are going to defend the gospel, need not

study oratory, or become expert in pleadings such as are used at law. Tell the truth and baffle the devil. Truth is the most powerful weapon and the most subtle policy. I believe that even in affairs of state truth is wisdom. No diplomatic agent would so confound intriguers as a man who should tell the truth. They would conclude that what he said was a lie, because they are accustomed to regard everything as having another meaning. An ambassador was formerly said to be a gentleman who is sent abroad to lie for the good of his country; but I hope it is not so now. If straightforward truth should ever become the policy of any country it would be invincible in council: if in politics a man were to throw away all arts and tricks, and adhere only to principle, he must gain respect. The greatest art in all the world is to fling all art away, and the grandest policy is to have no policy, but honest dealing. The bravest thing that can ever be done, and the most noble, is to be artless and harmless as a dove. There, then, is the policy of your warfare,—be prudent, but be innocent and simple-minded. Oh, the power of truthfulness! Do not believe that men are strong in proportion as they are artful. By no manner of means. Do not believe that they are strong in proportion as they can bend a fist. No, the power of a Christian must lie in his holy heart, and in his earnest tongue, and in his look of love. By this he shall vanquish, but by nothing else.

The conclusion of my sermon is this. Does it come home to you, brothers and sisters? Do you hear the Lord sending you out to work? Then, I entreat you, go forth. Suppose I make that one sentence my last word,—go forth. You may have heard of the Scotch officer who had his men drawn up for the battle, and felt bound to make them a speech, and so he pointed to the enemy, and said, "There they are, lads; if you don't kill them, they will kill you." My word is the same: there are the enemies of all righteousness, the enemies of Christ, the enemies of the good of men, the enemies of progress: if you do not overthrow them by publishing the gospel to all according to your ability, they will overthrow you. Which is it to be? By the grace of the Eternal and the omnipotence of him who bled for us, we will conquer even by his cross after his own fashion. Only let his Holy Spirit rest upon us. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke x. 1—23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—449, 679, 671.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

BRAVE WAITING.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 26TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

* Wait on the Lord : be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart : wait, I say, on the Lord."—Psalm xxvii. 14.

THE Christian's life is no child's play. All who have gone on pilgrimage to the celestial city have found a rough road, sloughs of despond and hills of difficulty, giants to fight and tempters to shun. Hence there are two perils to which Christians are exposed; the one is that under heavy pressure they should start away from the path which they ought to pursue,—the other is lest they should grow fearful of failure, and so become faint-hearted in their holy course. Both these dangers had evidently occurred to David, and in the text he is led by the Holy Spirit to speak about them. "Do not," he seems to say, "do not think that you are mistaken in keeping to the way of faith; do not turn aside to crooked policy, do not begin to trust in an arm of flesh, but wait upon the Lord;" and, as if this were a duty in which we are doubly apt to fail, he repeats the exhortation, and makes it more emphatic the second time, "Wait, I say, on the Lord." Hold on with your faith in God, persevere in walking according to his will; let nothing seduce you from your integrity,—let it never be said of you, "Ye did run well, what did hinder you that you did not obey the truth?" And lest we should be faint in our minds, which was the second danger, the psalmist says, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart." There is really nothing to be depressed about, there is no real danger, you are safe while God lives, and while Christ pleads, and while the Spirit of God dwells in you; therefore be not dismayed, nor even dream of fear. Be not timorous and unbelieving, but play the man; "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart." The object of our discourse this morning will be the encouragement of those who feel in any degree whatever dispirited and depressed on account of the hard places of the way, or the opposition of the world. May the Divine Spirit, whose peculiar office it is to be the Comforter of his people, now give the oil of joy to all who mourn, and courage to all who tremble.

No. 1,371.

work if with your whole heart you wait upon the Lord. We do ill if we stand idly gazing up into heaven expecting his coming, and making it a pretence for doing little or nothing to win souls: our wisest course is, as men that expect their Lord, to stand with our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed. You know what the Orientals meant by having their loins girt, they gathered up their loose flowing garments when they meant work, even as a hardworking man among us takes off his coat and works in his shirt-sleeves. Stand like workmen with your sleeves up—that is the English of it, ready for any work which your Master may appoint. You put on the livery of the Lord Jesus years ago when you were baptized into his name; take care to keep it spotless, for it is known to be connected with a sinless prince. Never by disobedience make the livery to be a lie, for if you be not his servants wherefore should you wear the garb of his household? Beloved, “he that waiteth upon his master shall be honoured.” Let us not fail in waiting upon ours.

Sometimes the servant will have to wait in absolute inaction, and this is not always to the taste of energetic minds. I suppose that walking round Jericho six days and doing nothing must have been very distasteful to the men of war who wanted to be coming to blows. They might have said, “Why should we and all the multitude march round the walls and do nothing? The men of war chafed in their harness, and longed to be at the foe. It is said that Wellington kept back the Guards at Waterloo till far into the fight, and it must, I should think, have needed much courage on their part to remain calm and quiet while cannon were roaring, and the battle raging, and the shots flying about them. They must not stir till the commander-in-chief gives the order, “Up, Guards, and at them!” then will they clear the field and utterly annihilate the foe. They were as much serving their country by lying still till the time came as they were by dashing forward when at last the word was given. Wait then upon your Lord in all sorts of service and patience, for this is what he would have you to do.

Another form of this waiting may be compared to *a traveller waiting the directions of his guide*, or a mariner waiting upon the pilot who takes charge of his ship. We are to wait upon God for direction in the entire voyage of life; he is at the helm, and his hand is to steer our course. I am fearful that some Christians very greatly fail in waiting upon the Lord for guidance, yet the types and examples of the Old Testament very strongly enforce this duty. I will give you one type and one example. The type shall be Israel in the wilderness. There was a straight way to Canaan, and I suppose it would not occupy many days to go from Goshen to Jerusalem. They must not, however, take that way, but follow their leader. When they had wandered even for a year in the wilderness, they might soon have reached the land, for in fact they were near its borders; but no, they must go where the famous pillar, which indicated the presence of God, should conduct them. If it remained stationary for a year the tents must not remove; if it was up early in the morning, again, and again, and again, for a whole succession of weary marching days, Israel must not dare to rest. Under the shade of the pillar of cloud must they abide by day, and its light must be their glory by night. Everywhere they were to wait for the heavenly signal,

and never choose their own path. Do you watch the cloud, my brethren? Do you wait upon the Lord for guidance? Do you continually say, "I pray thee show me thy way?" Do you commit your own way unto the Lord? If not, how little you have learned the true position and privilege of the people of God. The example I take from David's own life. If you have noticed the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Chronicles, you will read that David, being threatened by the Philistines, enquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go up against them?" and he had for an answer, "Go up, for I will deliver them into thine hands." Encouraged by the oracle he went forth to the attack, and carried all before him like the breaking forth of a flood. The Philistines rallied again and spread themselves abroad in the valley, and surely David might have felt quite safe in again falling upon them. What further directions could he need? Would not the former oracle avail now that the same circumstances were occurring? But no, the man of God did not feel safe until he had laid the new case before the Lord, and it is recorded "therefore David enquired again of God." This time the response was very different; possibly to his own surprise David received orders not to go up after the Philistines, but to turn away from them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. When he should hear a sound of him going in the tops of the mulberry trees he was to bestir himself, but not just then. He followed the new directions and again smote the host of the Philistines. Brother, wait on the Lord often. Though you were wise in the last intricate business, you may be a fool over the next simple matter; in fact, it is over the simple matters that we make our great blunders in life, even as Israel did with the Gibeonites; when they came with old shoes and clouted, and bread that was mouldy, half an eye might have sufficed to see through their trick, but Israel acted hastily, ate bread with them, made a treaty with them, and inquired not at the hand of the Lord. Not so David, he was never slow to seek divine guidance. I admire that which comes out incidentally about him in the saying of Ahimelech, the priest at Nob. When Saul accused him of having enquired of the Lord for David, Ahimelech replied, "Did I then begin to enquire of God for him?" as much as to say, "He is an old frequenter of the Lord's courts, he has enquired of God many and many a time ere this. To accuse me of inquiring of the Lord for him, as though I was abetting rebellion, is unjust, for I only did for David what I had often done before." Hence it was that David behaved himself wisely in a perfect way, because he followed not his own judgment but waited on the Lord. There was an occasion when he marched against Nabal in the heat of his wrath, when he went in his own spirit, and not under heavenly influences, and had it not been that the Lord sent a wise woman to cross his path, he had shed blood that day and it would have been a grief of mind to him all his life. Oh that we did more sincerely wait upon the Lord in the sense of seeking instruction as to our path in life, then would he fulfil his promise unto us, "Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it."

I have not yet exhausted the word "wait"; for we ought to wait upon God as a child waits upon its parent. Our children can seldom be accused of having small expectations with reference to us. They have desires and wants almost countless, and they always expect their parents

readily to supply them, in which reckoning I have no doubt they have been strongly confirmed by their past experience. No little child thinks of providing for himself, nor does he dream of directing his own course in life. You cannot get that little head to be thoughtful about to-morrow's food; you cannot force that little heart to be anxious about the next suit of clothes. To all suggested doubt the little lips reply, "My father knows what I have need of, and I am sure he will give it to me." Such is the happy, restful life of a loving child, and this is as it should be with us. It is my Father's business to provide for me: his name is Jehovah-Jirch. It is my Father's business to preserve me; he has given his angels charge to keep me in all my ways. It is my Father's business to mark out the future for me; I cannot see even into to-morrow, my eyes are dim, but my Father knows all about what shall be, and he will be ready for whatever shall happen, therefore would I wait upon him, raise no questions, and expect great mercies. Blessed are they who are thus found waiting.

And then, perhaps, I may add one thing more, we should wait upon the Lord *as a courtier waits upon his prince*. He that is at court, and seeks to rise to favour, waits upon his prince with the desire to be employed in the royal service, that he may prove his loyal zeal. He counts any sort of employment at court to be a great honour; he tells his friends, and they accept it as a subject of congratulation, that he has obtained such-and-such work to do for the king. He delights to increase the honour and dignity of his prince's court, for he shares in it himself. Brethren, how carefully should you and I endeavour to show forth the honour of our Lord Jesus among the sons of men, for has he not made us kings and priests, and should we not exalt his glorious name for ever? We should seek to make our Lord Jesus famous to the world's end: our daily conversation, and our current character, our private and public behaviour should all tend to increase our Master's honour among the sons of men. We must be ready for anything for Jesus, and everything for Jesus, counting that we ourselves are honoured by disgrace if we bring honour to him. Sir Walter Raleigh was wise in his generation when he took off his richly embroidered cloak to spread it over a miry place, that Queen Elizabeth's feet might not be damped; the courtier knew how to smooth his own road by caring for his queen; and thus, with unselfish motives, out of pure reverence for our Lord, let us be willing to be made as the street to be walked over if Jesus can thereby be honoured. Let us lay out for our Lord the best that we have, even to the character which is dear to us as life itself, if by so doing we may bring glory to the holy and blessed name of our Redeemer. Henceforth it is ours to live unto the Lord and die unto the Lord. We will wait on the Lord and keep his way, and may his grace enable us daily to say, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope."

II. Secondly, COURAGE IS TO BE MAINTAINED. "Be of good courage." Our good Lord and Master ought not to be followed by cowards. Be of good courage, you that wait on the Lord. Have *the courage of hope* concerning the faith which you are exercising upon Christ. You are just beginning, some of you, to believe in Jesus, and you are afraid that he will cast you away, or fearful that you will not obtain full salvation from sin. I have already told you to continue to

knock at mercy's door; do so, but be of good courage, for that door will certainly open to you. He that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Take heart, poor fainting one, the Lord hath a tender eye towards mourning souls; he is very good to those who seek him. Though thou be like poor trembling Mercy who fainted outside the door of the interpreter's house, yet thy Lord thinketh upon thee, and he says, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?" He will not suffer those to perish who humbly wait on him; the light of his countenance shall yet be thine. Be of good courage, O seeker!

Be, also, of good courage you who have newly found him. Be bold to *avow your faith*. Remember that the trust which you repose in Jesus is a justifiable one, and can be vindicated against all comers, therefore do not hide it. I hate to see a Christian act like a rat behind a wainscot, who comes peeping out when everything is still to see if anybody is about, so that he may get his crumbs, but if there is half a sound of a foot anywhere away he slips and hides himself in his hole. Nay, if you belong to Christ, avow it. What is there to be ashamed of? To believe the truth—shall a man blush at that? To follow infinite purity and holiness incarnate in Christ Jesus, is there anything to be ashamed of in that? Nay, rather let us wear our colours before the face of all men, and lift high our banner in all companies, for it is rather a cause for glorying than for blushing that we are on the Lord's side. It is the best thing about us, it is the greatest mercy we have ever received, why should we conceal it? Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and confess your faith before men, you that have newly been brought to Jesus.

Then go further. Be of good courage in *endeavouring to spread the faith* which you have received. When you go to speak to others about the great salvation, be not afraid. If it be new work to you, I dare say you will tremble, but still do it, and ask the Lord to give you greater confidence in proclaiming the tidings of his grace. If you speak with infidels, be of good courage, though for a while you cannot lead them to believe. If you speak to those who are incensed against the truth, be of good courage: what harm can they do to you that shall be equal to the harm you will suffer by becoming a coward? Be of good courage, and undertake great things for Christ; do not expect a defeat, but dare and venture all for him. Do something more than you are able to do, expecting strength beyond your own to be afforded you, and it will certainly come. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart." Be of good courage, then, in the way of practical energy for the advancement of your Redeemer's cause.

Be of good courage *when you pray for others*. Wait on the Lord about your children, and be of good courage and expect to see them saved. Wait on the Lord about your servants, about your brothers and sisters, about your neighbours; be of good courage about them, believe that God hears prayer and that your intercessions will bless those for whom you pray. Intercession has great influence with God; it is no vain thing to wait upon the Lord for the souls of others. Thousands now in heaven owe their conversion to the prayers of the saints, and therefore plead with great courage. Never cease to pray, and when you pray,

pray not as though you spoke to a tyrant reluctant to hear, or to a forgetful God, who would fail to answer, but wait on him with quiet confidence and you shall not come empty away.

Be of good courage, too, also in *making self-sacrifices* for the cause of Christ. If you lose a situation because you are honest, be of good courage, you will be no loser in the long run. Are there some who despise you because you are a Christian? Be of good courage, their opinion is of very little worth, and in the judgment of angels and good men you stand very high. Are you like Moses when he refused the treasures of Egypt, with all the honours of the court? Be of good courage, the Lord will give you, even in this life, a recompense, and in the world to come life everlasting. If it should come to losing all you have for Jesus' sake, be of good courage, for he that loseth his life for Christ's sake shall find it, and he that becometh poor for the cause of Christ shall be rich eternally. Be of good courage!

Once again, if you are called to *endure great affliction*, sharp pain, frequent sickness; if business goes amiss, if riches take to themselves wings and fly away, if friends forsake you and foes surround you, be of good courage, for the God upon whom you wait will not forsake you. Never let it be said that a soldier of the cross flinched in the day of battle. Bear your Father's will, glad to have such a Father's will to bear. If grace cannot enable us to endure all that nature can heap upon us, what is grace worth? Now is the time, my dear brother, in the floods of adversity, to see whether your faith is real faith or not. Mere sunshine faith is not worth the having; we want that which will outlive the most terrible storm that ever beclouded the heavens. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, though heart and flesh should fail you. Though eyes grow dim and the light of day should be quite shut out, though hearing should fail and the daughters of music be silent, though all the doors of the senses should be closed, though the bearers of the body should totter and the keepers of the house should tremble, yea, though death itself should remove this feeble body, yet there is no cause for fear, but we may exclaim with dying Jacob, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." Let not your hearts be troubled, wait on the Lord, and courage shall revive.

III. Our third point is, that *WAITING UPON GOD SUSTAINS COURAGE*. Beloved, if ever you begin to grow weary in the good ways of God, wait upon him with double earnestness. You have heard of the famous giant whom Hercules could not kill, because the earth was his mother, and every time Hercules dashed him down he obtained fresh strength by touching his parent, and rose again to the fight. We are of like nature, and every time we are driven to our God, though we be dashed upon him by defeat, we grow strong again, and our adversary's attempt is foiled. Our foe will never destroy us unless he can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, and that is impossible. Waiting upon God is the way to renew our strength until we mount up with eagle's wings and leave the world below.

In the first place, our heart is strengthened by waiting upon God, because *we thus receive a mysterious strength* through the incoming of the Eternal Spirit into our souls. No man can explain this, but many of us know what it is. We do not know how the Holy Ghost operates, but

we are conscious that after a season of prayer we are often much refreshed, and feel as if we had been ground young again. We have gone in before the Lord haggard and worn, desponding, and (shame upon us, we must add) ready to give up, turn tail, and run away. We have not long drawn near to God before we have felt our spirit revive. Though our approach was mostly a groan, yet we did wait upon the Lord, and the Eternal strength came into us. How wonderfully do the secret springs of omnipotence break into the feeble soul and fill it with might in the inner man. Through the sacred anointing of the Holy Ghost we have been made to shout for joy, we have been so glad in the Lord that we could not contain our joy. He that made us has put his hand a second time to the work, and restored unto us the joy of his salvation, filled our emptiness, removed our weakness, and triumphed in us gloriously. The poor harp which had been long played upon could not at length yield music to its owner's hand; in vain the bardic fingers roamed over the strings, the more heavily they were struck the more discordant were the sounds. The harp was taken from the hall and laid aside in a quiet chamber, and there its Maker came to deal with it. He knew its frame, and understood the art of tuning it. He put new strings in here and there, and set the rest aright, and the next time the harper laid his fingers among the strings pure music floated forth, and flooded the palace with melody. Where discord had peopled the air with evil sprites all was changed, and it seemed as though angels leaped forth with silver wings from every chord. Ay, go thou to thy God, poor soul, when thou art out of order; wait on the Lord, and he will strengthen thine heart by his mysterious power.

Besides this, waiting upon the Lord has an effect upon the mind, which in the natural course of things tends to strengthen our courage; for waiting upon God *makes men grow small*, and dwarfs the world and all its affairs, till we see their real littleness. Poor David sat fretting about the ungodly, as he saw them prospering in their way, while as for himself he was plagued all the day and chastened every morning. Foolishly and ignorantly he complained of the Lord, and questioned his justice, "until," saith he, "I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end." Set your great troubles before the infinite God, and they will dwarf into such little things that you will never notice them again. He taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and the nations are as a drop in a bucket; and this great God will teach you to look at earthly things in the same light as he does, till, though the whole world should be against you, you would smile at its rage, and though all the devils in hell should rise against you you would defy their fury. Our worst ills are utterly despised when we learn to measure them by the line of the Eternal: thus you see that waiting upon God strengthens the heart by lessening the causes of fear.

And then *it inflames the heart with love*. Nothing can give us greater courage than a sincere affection for our Lord and his work. Courage is sure to abound where love is fervent. Look among the mild and gentle creatures of the brute creation and see how bold they are when once they become mothers and have to defend their offspring. A hen will fight for her chicks, though at another time she is one of the most timid of birds. Mr. White, in his book on Selborne, tells of a raven that

was hatching her young in a tree. The woodman began to fell it, but there she sat; the blows of the axe shook the tree, but she never moved, and when it fell she was still upon her nest. Love will make the most timid creature strong; and, oh, beloved, if you love Christ you will defy all fear, and count all hazards undergone for him to be your joy. In this sense, also, perfect love casteth out fear, it hopeth all things, endureth all things, and continues still to wait upon the Lord. To have more love we must more continually wait upon the Lord, and this will mightily renew the strength of our heart.

Again, waiting upon the Lord *breeds peace* within the soul, and when a man is perfectly at rest within he cares little for trials or foes. It is conscience that doth make cowards of us all, but let conscience be pacified through the atoning blood of Jesus, and you can smile when others spit their venom at you, and like your blessed Master you can bear their taunts without reply, for there is a heavenly calm within: A heart unsettled towards God is sure to be afraid of men, but when the soul waits on the Lord in glad serenity it stoops not to fear.

And, beloved, this waiting upon the Lord produces the effect of increasing our courage, because it *gives us often a sight of the eternal reward*, and if a man getteth a glimpse of the crown of glory, the crown of thorns will no more prick his temples. He that seeth what he shall be in the day when Christ shall be revealed, mourneth not because of what he now is while he beareth the reproach of Christ. In fact, waiting upon God makes us see that we are in fellowship with Christ and causes us to know that the load we carry is a cross of which he always bears the heaviest end: it lets us see that his heart is full of sensitive sympathy towards us, and so it makes us suffer without complaining. Is it not sweet to sing—

"If on my face for thy dear name,
Shame and reproach shall be,
I'll hail reproach and welcome shame
For thou'lt remember me?"

Thus waiting upon the Lord pours power into the central reservoir of our strength.

IV. Now I finish with the fourth point, which is, *EXPERIENCE PROVES THIS*. I want you to keep your Bibles open at the twenty-seventh Psalm, and see how my text is a summary of the entire psalm. All the rest of the verse may be compared to the figures of an account, and this closing verse is the casting up of the whole—waiting on the Lord is the path of wisdom.

For, first, in the opening verses David had been surrounded by enemies: he waited upon the Lord and the Lord made them stumble and fall. Afterwards, when they fought against him he told his sorrow to his God, and God lifted his head high above his enemies round about him, till he could sing in the sanctuary songs of exultant joy unto the Lord. My brethren, do the same when you are assailed. You are not in a country subject to actual war, but you have many adversaries, spiritual and otherwise. You have the prince of darkness armed against you, and a host of spiritual wickednesses in high places. Wait on the Lord in this conflict, and he will give you victory. Your strength

is to sit still. Fret not yourself. Quietly refer all the contest to him who returns from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, travelling in the greatness of his strength, because his foes and yours are trodden beneath his feet. Wait on the Lord. Get you away to the shadow of his pavilion, hide in the secret of his tabernacle. Climb you up upon the rock, and keep you there, and all the adversaries of your soul shall be broken in pieces.

Next, read the seventh and eighth verses, and you will see David occupied in prayer, and there, too, he succeeded and prospered abundantly, because in prayer he waited on the Lord. The very essence of prayer is to get the ear of God. You might as well whistle as pray unless you pray in spirit and in truth; and the very spirit and truth of prayer must lie in communion with God himself. If you have been praying after a fashion, and you have not gained that which you prayed for, surely you have not yet reached the ear of God. Get into the secret place, go close to your Lord, and wait upon him in very deed; then shall you have great courage in prayer, renew your strength, and come back victorious.

Next, David had been enveloped in darkness. He was afraid that God was about to forsake him. He had lost the light of Jehovah's countenance. I think I hear one say, "What am I to do in such a case?" Wait on the Lord. If he does not smile, wait on him still. The smile of his face is delightful, but if you lose it, hide under the shadow of his wing. When he does not smile he still loves. "Though he slay me," said Job, "yet will I trust in him." Even when he seems an angry God yet throw yourself at his feet. Let nothing drive you away from him. If he lifts his sword to smite, the further off, the heavier the blow will fall. Run close in, dear child, if your Father is going to whip you; run close in, he cannot strike hard then. Draw very near to your Father's heart; lay hold on his strength, and put him against himself as it were, pleading his love against his wrath and saying, "Thou hast sworn that thou wilt not be wroth with me, nor rebuke me: therefore deal tenderly with thy child." If any walk in darkness and see no light, let him still trust and wait on the Lord.

In the next sense we find David forsaken by everybody. Father and mother had left him, still he waits upon the Lord and the Lord takes him up. Now that you are quite alone, dear widow, and the husband of your love is gone, wait on the Lord. Now that the children one by one have been carried to the silent tomb, wait on the Lord, and he will be better to you than ten sons. Now, young man, you are drifting about London without a helper, wait on the Lord, and he will direct your way. Yea, all of you who, either from persecution or bereavement, have come to be solitary, remember the Lord setteth the solitary in families, and maketh them families like a flock. Wait upon him and all will be well.

Next we find David in a difficult road, so that he prays, "Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies;" but waiting on the Lord exactly met the case. Whenever you cannot tell what to do, wait upon the Lord. When the road turns this way and that, and you know not which is right, kneel down and pray; you will know which way to go when you rise from your knees, or if you do not, kneel down again. The directing post is best seen when we are in

prayer. The oracle shall answer to you out of the excellent majesty when you have resigned your will and believingly sought direction from the Most High.

To conclude, we find next that David had been slandered by his enemies—"False witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty." What then? Wait upon the Lord still. "Oh, but I must answer them." Yes, and then you will make bad worse; your slanderers will forge another lie when you have answered the first. "Oh, but," says one, "I could bear such a charge if it were true." Ah, but *then* you ought not to bear it, the truth of an ill report ought to grieve you, but if it is not true, never mind, let it alone. "Oh, but they say —." What do they say?—Let them say it. No hurt will come of it. Wait you upon the Lord. They rail at you, take care not to rail again. Make no reply to howling wolves. When dogs bark let them bark, for it is their nature; they will leave off when they have done; and so with all our adversaries, they will confute themselves if we will but let them alone. Our strength is to wait upon the Lord, tell him about it and leave it with him. Go to law? Yes, and get a suit which will not wear out in a hurry. Go to law, and bring upon yourself no end of troubles. In all other things except slander if you want a thing done do it yourself, but there, if you want to be well defended, let others defend you. Dirt will rub off when it is dry; be bravely patient. Wait you upon the Lord, commit everything to him, and he will see you through, even to the triumphant end. All that you can do in your own justification will only make more mischief. Hands off, there, and leave it with the Most High.

So we close by repeating our blessed text: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." May he keep you waiting courageously for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxvii.

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GOD OUR PORTION AND HIS WORD OUR TREASURE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPT. 2ND, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

"Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words."—
Psalm cxix. 57.

OBSERVE the close connection between privilege and duty. "Thou art my portion, O Lord;" this is an unspeakable happiness. "I have said that I would keep thy words"—this is the fitting return for such a blessing. Every mercy given us of the Lord brings with it a claim which we ought in gratitude to recognise.

Notice very carefully the order in which the privilege and the duty are arranged. The blessing of grace is first and the fruit of gratitude next. The grace given is the root and the resolve is the fruit growing out of it. It is not, "I have said that I would keep thy words, that thou mayest be my portion, O Lord." No; first the portion is enjoyed by faith, and then the resolution is formed. "Thou art my portion, O Lord, I have thee already in present possession; therefore will I, as thou shalt help me, keep thy words." Duty in order to privilege is the law: God be thanked that we are not under it, for we should never obtain a single blessing thereby: but privilege in order to obedience is the gospel: God grant that we may know the fulness of its power to sanctify our souls. The Lord must first be your portion before you will be able to keep his words. How can a man keep what he has not received? Without God to be our portion, where will the strength come from to accomplish so difficult a duty as the keeping of God's words? See to it, all of you, that you do not reverse the order. Do not, as the old proverb says, put the cart before the horse. Let all things come in their due course and keep due rank, for mischief comes of the wrong placing of things. First receive from divine grace until thou canst say, "Thou art my portion, O Lord," and then give forth by daily service what God has worked within, and say, "I will keep thy words."

Each possession not only involves service, but appropriate service, even as each plant bears its own flower. The general principle which calls for service bears a particular application, for each particular gospel benefit is

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linked with some special gospel service. The unspeakable boon of having God for our portion has here fastened to it the peculiar excellence of keeping God's words; and one object of the present sermon will be to show that this is by no means an accidental arrangement, but that a true connection really exists, and ought to be earnestly acknowledged by every child of God. Because you can say "Thou art my portion, O Lord," you ought also to add, "I will keep thy words."

First, this morning, let us consider *the infinite possession*—"Thou art my portion, O Lord;" and secondly, *the appropriate resolution*—"I have said that I would keep thy words."

I. Begin, then, where the text begins, with **THE INFINITE POSSESSION**. "Thou art my portion, O Lord." Here first notice *a clear distinction*. The psalmist declares the Lord to be his portion in distinction to the portion of the ungodly. "These often have their portion in this life; they increase in riches." The seventy-third psalm gives a full and particular description of the ungodly in their prime and glory, when "their eyes stand out with fatness," and "they have more than heart can wish." But David did not desire to share their short-lived joys, he sought his happiness elsewhere, looking to the Creator rather than the creatures, and to eternity rather than time,—

"What sinners value I resign;
Lord, 'tis enough if thou art mine."

"Thou art my portion, O Lord." It is better to have our good God than all the goods in the world: it is better to have God for our all than to have all and be without him. He who possesses God lives at the well-head and drinks from the ever-flowing fountain; he who owns the choicest worldly good, apart from him, only drinks of the foul leavings which remain in the corners of earth's broken cisterns. What is the whole universe compared with him who made it? What are the base pleasures of sin compared with the fulness of joy which ever dwells at God's right hand?

David says "Thou art my portion," evidently in opposition to the future portion of the wicked. "Upon the wicked God shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." There is to come to the ungodly a dreadful awakening from their dream of security; they shall start up in another world to find that their wealth has vanished, that their joys have for ever fled, and that they must for ever suffer the loss of all things, and remain utterly undone. For them a woe unutterable is prepared, and wrath like a fierce hurricane shall beat upon their guilty souls without end: but "Thou art my portion, O Lord"; for me there shall be no deadly snares in life, nor horrible tempest in death. So long as I abide in this body I shall be fed upon thy goodness, and when I shall fall asleep, and shall afterwards awaken in the likeness of my Redeemer, I shall find myself in eternal possession of my God, who is mine all in all.

Nor does the distinction end here. The psalmist David here makes a distinction between his true position and the earthly comforts with which the Lord had endowed him. He was a king, and had many possessions, but none of these were his portion. Some of the Lord's people are not the subjects of distressing poverty; on the contrary, they are blest with

many comforts for which they ought to praise God day and night, but none of these things are their peculiar heritage as joint heirs with Jesus. Beloved, whatever we have in this world we are bound to turn our eye to God and say, "This is not my portion; thou art my portion, O Lord." The comforts of this life are like the youth's spending allowance, they are not the estate to which he is the heir, upon which he will enter when the fulness of time shall come. Present mercies are a sip by the way, a morsel eaten to stay the stomach; our full meal will be eaten at the great supper of the Lamb. We are like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in Canaan, dwelling in tents, as strangers and foreigners. The flocks and herds which graze around our camp are greatly valued, but still we look not on those things as our portion: Canaan itself is the lot of our covenanted inheritance, and nothing else will content us. We look for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. Oh, beloved, take care of ever making common things your portion. If riches increase, set not your heart upon them; if God indulges you with a healthful and happy family, if you yourself are in a good state of bodily health, if your business prospers, and if the Lord pours you out temporal mercies from a full horn, yet never make these things your idols: live above them, and say, "I cannot be put off with these: thou art my portion, O God."

I think David carried this distinction right away into eternity. Some think of heaven as this and some as that. Fellowship with believers of all ages is the great desire of some; others long for paradise as a place of increased knowledge, to know even as they are known; and a third rejoice in it chiefly as a haven of rest. There are grounds for each of these forms of desire, but concerning heaven this is the believer's chief thought, that he will be with God, and that God will be for ever his joy and bliss. No sins will hide the brightness of Jehovah's glory from our eyes, no doubts disturb the deep calm of our enjoyment of Jehovah's love when once we fully enter upon our portion. We shall be for ever with the Lord, and nothing more or better can be imagined. God is our heaven. Whom have I in heaven but thee? Draw, then, ever a clear distinction between the things that are seen, which are *not* your portion, and the things which are not seen, which are your true heritage; between the temporal and fleeting joys which amuse us by the way, and the abiding and eternal felicity which will satisfy us at the end. Allow nothing to rival the chief good in your judgment or your affections, but cry evermore, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee."

Notice next *the positive claim*—"Thou art my portion, O Lord." He deliberately declares this in the silence of his soul. As for the ungodly, they are boasting of their prosperity, they are girding themselves with pride as with a golden chain; but I dare not seek my joy in such matters, "Thou art my portion, O Lord." To get into a corner quietly, to commune with your heart and be still, and then to find your soul revelling in the wealth which she finds in her God—this is true happiness. Let worldlings babble on as they may, and let the trumpet of fame sound out its loudest blasts for her darlings, we will not envy her rich men or her great men so long as in the deep of our spirit we can feel that the Eternal himself has declared, "I will be their God." Ours is the best

portion by far. Whether here we have little or much, our hereafter is our true treasure, for then shall we to the full enjoy our God. These store-rooms and barns, banks and iron safes, cannot hold our portion; behold our treasure is secured where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, neither do thieves break through and steal.

It is worthy of observation that this clear claim which David sets up is not merely felt in his own heart, but it is uttered in the most solemn place, even in the presence of God. He addresses himself to the all-seeing, heart-searching God, and cries, "*Thou art my portion, O Lord.*" Though I stand before thee, great God, even before thee, who can read me through and through, yet dare I make my claim. Thou knowest all things, and thou knowest that I do choose thee to be mine all in all. Though I gaze upon thy splendour, which bids angels veil their faces because of its excess of glory, yet I call that splendour mine. However great thou art, I adore with trembling, but yet my faith calls thy greatness mine. Thou art my portion; nothing less than thine own self, O infinitely glorious, omnipotent, thrice-holy Jehovah. My soul doth not bound her humble claim, nor rest content with a part of thee; but thou, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thou one God, thou thyself art my portion. Do you see how fully assured of his interest in divine love a man must be if he dares to speak thus in the presence of the infinite Majesty, and to challenge the divine judgment upon his claim?

You see he speaks in the present tense. There are a great many whose religion lies in "shall be's," hopes and trusts, but David's faith lay in the present tense. "*Thou art my portion, O Lord.*" There are some things which I have not received as yet, but I have already laid hold upon my God. Many things I press forward to obtain, for I have aspirations which as yet are unfulfilled, and spiritual ambitions not yet satisfied, but thou art even now my God, despite my infirmities and shortcomings. Yes, even to-day, my God, thou art mine. At this hour "*My Beloved is mine, and I am his.*" I know whom I have believed, I know that he has given himself to me as I have given myself to him. Beyond a doubt, thou art at this very moment my portion, O Lord. The Lord teach you, brothers and sisters, to speak in the same confident manner. If true believers, you have a right so to speak, because you simply declare a fact. Do not be satisfied to leave such a matter in question; aim at positive certainty. Pray the Lord to give you the full assurance of faith that you may always unwaveringly say, "*Thou art my portion, O Lord.*"

Now let us linger for a few moments while we muse upon *the portion itself*, a subject which it might require many an hour fully to consider. The text contains an intelligent description of this portion—"Thou art my portion, O Lord." The psalmist at once mentions the very heart and centre of his spiritual wealth—"Thou art my portion, O Lord." What a *boundless* portion. Parochial authorities beat the bounds of the parish, and great men make surveys of their estates, but none can beat the bounds or make a full survey of this inheritance of the saints. A man takes stock in trade, or sits down to balance his accounts; there is no taking stock here: towards the infinite God there are no calculations, figures are lost, and even imagination swallowed up. Our inheritance surpasses that of all the men of the world put together; yea, and, apart

from having something of the like, even angels could not vie with us. Heaven itself is not so vast a treasure as the God of heaven. How ought we to prize an inheritance which knows no boundary. Indeed, brethren, we require something boundless, our soul pines for the infinite. I appeal to those of you who have been favoured in divine providence with prosperity beyond what you expected. Do you feel that it fills your soul? You are content that God should give you what he wills, but do you find satisfaction in earthly property? What if your children are a comfort to you, and your house is filled with all manner of store, and friendly neighbours speak well of you, yet can you find perfect rest in these things? Do they yield you inward heart-filling joy? I know they cannot. If you were to be as highly favoured as Solomon himself, who beyond all men enjoyed this present world, yet would you have to come to Solomon's own conclusion, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." For a regenerate man this life is like a bird within a shell just wakened into life. However comfortable the shell may be for him in its way and after its fashion, yet as life becomes vigorous he wants more space; he needs wing room, he wants to get out of his prison and roam at large. The things which are seen are a prison to the soul, our spirit needs more air, more space in which to breathe. When a man can truly say, "My God, thou art mine," he has touched the confines of the infinite, and he has reached the *ultima thule* of his spirit, where he may cast anchor, and no more tempt the troubled sea of desire. When we reach God our soul is at peace, but not till then; for then the immortal soul has gained the immortal God, and eternal destiny is sealed with happiness by eternal love.

And while this inheritance is boundless, how *abiding* it is! A man who has the Lord for his portion has a freehold for eternity. His lease will never run out, and there will need no renewal of lives, for there is one life on which our tenure hangs, and that is everlasting. "Because I live, ye shall live also." He that getteth God hath an entailed estate. He hath in him a friend who cannot change, who cannot fail, who cannot cease to be, nor cease to be the source of blessedness to those who possess him. Of this portion time cannot deprive us, nor death rob us, nor judgment deprive us, nor eternity bereave us. "This God is our God for ever and ever." Ah, ye worldlings, all your goods shall wither like Jonah's gourd, but our God shall be our shield and our exceeding great reward world without end.

As the Lord is an abiding portion, so is he an *appropriate* portion, in every way suitable to content the soul. Man was made in the image of God, and nothing will satisfy man but God, in whose image he was made. Manna was fit food for man, and God himself is fit sustenance for the man of God. Only in the Lord can the mind and heart find that which all their faculties require for their development and perfection. When renewed by grace, our powers are adapted to receive God, and to rejoice in him; and hence a full possession of God is the craving of the heart. In God there is food for memory, which looks upon the past, and for hope, which gazes into the future: for judgment, which weighs, and for will, which decides; for the affections, which clasp, and for the imagination, which creates. There is no power of humanity which is properly a part of God-made man which does not find its due sphere and place in God. How well my portion suits me! Adam was not more at home in

paradise than I am in my God. My soul by grace is brought into a place of sweet content, and delights herself in the abundance of peace.

This portion is to the fullest degree *satisfying*. Nothing else will ever end the awful hunger of the soul of man, which, like the grave, for ever yawns for more; but the infinite God fills the heart, and he who has gotten the Lord for his portion hath all that he can desire.

“All my capacious powers can wish
In thee doth richly meet.”

You may sit down and imagine all that you could have wished, and then if you rightly view your God, you will see that he surpasses all your desires. Never, even in eternity, will you be able to conceive of a joy beyond your God, a bliss surpassing himself.

Next, dear brethren, the Lord is an *elevating* portion. A man is gradually changed into the image of that which he loves. He who hath his portion in this world grows worldly. When a man gives himself to any pursuit he first of all moulds *it*, and then it moulds *him*. We say a man rides a hobby, but after a while the hobby rides the man. You will find it so. Now, if a man seeketh his wealth in the things of this life, and coveteth gold, he will become metallic, hard, and unfeeling. He who lives to increase his land soon becomes of the earth earthy. To pursue carnal things will degrade a man, cramp his mind, and hold him in captivity to base materialism. He that loveth to hoard that he may gratify his covetousness by counting over his stores, what a wretched creature he becomes. Better by far to be a poor squirrel who in due time enjoys the little store of nuts and acorns he has gathered than hoard for our heirs who will laugh at us for our pains. The worldling is little better than the mole who burrows through the earth, and never looks upon the sun. Earth, earth, earth, nothing but earth does the carnal heart care for; its faculties are all pressed downward, and forced to become adapted for its grovelling sphere. Nothing is more debasing than to live for self; and the more a selfish man has the more base-hearted does he become: but if our portion be the Lord our delight in him raises our thoughts and purifies our emotions. Covetousness, selfishness, worldliness all vanish when God is all in all to us. If God be ours we seek to be like him; we become followers of God as dear children. “He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself.” He who is possessed of the light is filled with light; he who has God is filled with God. The Holy Spirit transforms us until at last he makes us to be meet to dwell with him for ever.

Only one more thought on this portion, although many are crowding upon my mind. If God be my portion then my portion is *all of grace*, for no one can merit God. The idea is utterly ridiculous, if not profane. No human excellence could merit deity. If, then, the Lord be my portion let my song be always of that rich, free, sovereign, boundless grace which is given to me who deserves hell, but obtain heaven.

I want to call your attention once more to this infinite possession, or rather to the *seasonable utterance* of David concerning it, for it is very noteworthy that this holy claim has generally been made by godly men at peculiar times. Did you ever notice the parallel passages? Truly the Lord is his people's God at all times, but his people rejoice most in the possession of him when they have most trouble. In the particular instance before us I find in the fifty-first verse, “The proud have had me

greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law," and in the sixty-first verse—"The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law." David appears to have been between two fires—derided by the proud and robbed by the oppressor, and it is in the middle of this double trouble that he puts in his claim, "Thou art my portion, O Lord." Perhaps the robbers helped him to think the more of that treasure which no thief can steal; perhaps the derision of the proud made him remember the kindly condescension of the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, who deigned to be his portion. Look at another instance, where the same language is used, namely, in Psalm xvi. 5, and you will find the psalmist declares, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." So far as this language is that of David at all, you see that he claims God for his portion in the prospect of death and the grave. How good it is to have a living hope in dying moments, to be full of light when peering into the darkness of the grave. When death is taking away everything else, then doth the Christian cling to the portion which can never be touched by death's bony finger. Read again in the seventy-third Psalm, at the twenty-sixth verse. There Asaph claims God as his portion. But you know the psalm is all about the trouble of mind which he felt whilst he fretted over his own affliction and contrasted it with the prosperity of the wicked. One more instance. In Lamentations iii. 24, Jeremiah says "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." But that is said in connection with a long roll of sorrows concerning which the prophet had said, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears." Beloved, learn this lesson—if in Scripture you find God claimed as the portion of his saints when under different forms of trial, then when you are in deep affliction, and when you come near to die, you also may find the strength of your heart, and the sustenance of your courage in this same blessed fact that the Lord is your portion.

II. Secondly, let us consider THE APPROPRIATE RESOLUTION—"I have said that I would keep thy words." Here notice *the preface*, "I have said." Why did he not put it, "Thou art my portion, O Lord; I will keep thy words"? No, he writes "I have said it," which means deliberation. He had thought over his happiness in having such a portion. What then? His thoughts began to stir within him and to devise a fit expression for his gratitude, and he at last said "I will keep thy words." It was no hasty thought but a determined resolve. I suppose he also means that he had given a distinct pledge. He had opened his mouth to the Lord, and could not go back. "I have said"—to my God, to myself, to my fellow-men—I have said I will keep thy words. It signifies, also, an adherence to what had been said:—I have said it, and there is an end of all question about it. Do not distress me any more, the die is cast. I have said it, and

"High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renew'd shall daily hear:
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."

I have said it, my God, and I will not unsay it. What I have written I have written. Others have heard me say it: I have said it in the presence of a cloud of witnesses, men and angels looking on. I have said it, and so let it stand in time and in eternity.

It is time that we now investigated *the link* between the portion possessed and the resolution made: it is not very difficult to discover. God is best known to us by his words. His works reveal him by a reflected light as the moon, but his words display him by a direct light as a very sun of light to us. How do I know God except by his words? The God of revelation is the Christian's God. Philosophers nowadays worship a God of their own imagination: they construct a God out of their own consciousness, and a very pretty God he is indeed: but the God of the Christian is the God who has spoken, and whose words are preserved here, in THE BOOK. The God of the inspired word is our God, and because this God is our portion, and we know him by his words, therefore have we said we will keep his words.

I want you to notice that always there seems to have been a connection between the possession of the portion and the keeping of the words. When God said to Abraham, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward," a little further down, in the sixth verse, we read, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." First he receives God to be his own—"I am thy shield": and then he keeps God's word, for he believes it. How did he know that God was his shield except through the word which God had spoken to him? Notice in the first verse, "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram," and again in the fourth verse, "And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him." He believed: this was Abraham's way of keeping the words of the Lord, and it is worthy of our imitation. Oh for grace to believe every word that God speaks, and never to start aside unto unbelief on any pretence whatever, for every word of the Lord is sure, and abideth true for ever.

By keeping God's words we fulfil the type of Israel in the wilderness. Do you not remember the story of the manna, which is contained in the sixteenth of Exodus? Now, the manna is so named, according to Rabbi Kimchi, because the people saw in it their "portion." Our version reads, "They said, It is manna: for they wist not what it was;" but according to the rabbi they said, "It is a portion: for they wist not what it was." Men did eat angels' food in the wilderness: they realised there that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Their feeding on manna was the type of the Lord being our portion; but what then? They ate the manna, but did they *keep* any part of it? Assuredly they did; see the thirty-second verse, "This is the thing which the Lord commandeth, Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations." God himself is my manna or portion, and therefore I will treasure up himself as he is revealed in his word, which is the golden pot in which the heavenly food is preserved. Brethren, let us keep the divine word in the very secrets of our heart as in a golden

pot, saying with the psalmist, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Another beautiful type of the exaltation which the believer gets when he can practically realize our text, will be found in Numbers xviii. 20, "And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in the land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel." See, beloved, we take our share with the high priest, for he had God to be his sole and only portion. Was it not a better portion than all the rest put together? Happy are the people whom the Lord Jesus has made to be priests, and to whom he has given the priest's portion, namely, himself. But what is our duty if this is the case? We must note how the priests of the tribe of Levi behaved, and imitate them. We read in Deut. xxxiii. 9, "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: *for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.*" Their heritage was the Lord and they kept his words, for the priest's lips should keep knowledge. They lived upon the meat of the Lord's house, and they were bound carefully to keep his ordinances. If you are priests unto God it falleth unto you likewise that as God is the lot of your inheritance and your portion, your daily business is, like the tribe of Levi, to observe the word of God and keep his covenant.

Moreover, the words of God are our title-deeds to our portion. Men despise them, and so might a stranger pour contempt upon old deeds relating to property in which he has no concern. "What is the good of those old parchments?" says the ignorant man when he sees legal documents. "What is the good of the old Book?" cry others even more ignorant. Ah, *we* know their value; those to whom those title-deeds secure an inheritance prize them exceedingly. Whenever you hear people talking about Bibliolatry, and finding fault with us for believing in verbal inspiration, you will find that they set small store by covenant treasures; and, what is more, you will soon discover that they tamper with our divine charter in order to rob us of the choice truths of the gospel, and that the top and bottom of their meddling with the divine words of inspiration is a design to take away their portion from the people of God. Let them alone, and you will soon see them tearing away one privilege after another, and making great havoc with our comforts. Therefore, warned by what we have seen them do, we have said, "I will keep thy words," for we shall not else be able to keep God for our portion. If we let even the jots and tittles go we may soon discover a flaw in our title, and we cannot afford to do that. Our possession is too precious for us to tamper with the securities by which we hold it. "Thou art my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep thy words."

Now, very briefly, what is *this work of keeping God's words*? I do pray God the Holy Spirit to help us to know it by practically carrying it out every day of our lives.

First, then, there is a word which above all is to be kept, enshrined in the heart and obeyed in the life. "In the beginning was the Word." That very name, "the Word," given to Christ puts the highest honour upon every other word of revelation. Beware of trifling or being negligent towards any word of the Lord, since Jesus Christ is the chief and

sum of the words of God. Keep him, hold him, abide in him, continue in him, never let him go.

"I have said that I would keep thy word"—this means the word of the *gospel*. This we will accept by sincere and simple faith. The gospel of free grace, of substitution, of atonement by blood, of justification by faith, this we will hold by faith right steadfastly so long as we breathe. All our hope hangs there, and therefore there we will abide, neither shall any seduce us from it.

"I have said that I would keep thy words,"—that is, "I will believe thy *doctrines*. When I cannot comprehend the great mysteries I will still believe them. Though others dispute, I will believe! Despite the insinuations of crafty men I will hold to the doctrines of grace intensely; believing them as long as reason holds her throne. What I see to be in God's word I will not dare to doubt or neglect. The doctrines of grace are the backbone of the Christian life. Keep to them for your comfort, and you shall never be ashamed of them. If you willingly tamper with any one of the doctrines, there is no knowing where you will drift. Cast out more anchors; never let the vessel drive.

"I have said that I would keep thy word;" that is, Thy word of *precept*. What thou biddest me do, I will delight to do. I will not merely rejoice in the doctrines, but in the commands also, and I will ask for grace to obey them all. I will keep thine *ordinances* too, for they are a part of thy word, and are to be kept as they were delivered, without addition or diminution. I will not say, "This is non-essential, and this is unimportant," but "I have said that I would keep thy words, and keep them I will, through thy grace, in every particular. I will do what thou biddest me, as thou biddest me, when thou biddest me." So much evil has grown out of slight departures from Scripture that Christian men ought to be very scrupulous, and carefully observe every ordinance as it is set forth in the word.

"I have said that I would keep thy words," that is, I will keep thy *promises* in my heart to comfort me. I will keep them in my faith, expecting their fulfilment; in my mind, for daily use and solace, and on my tongue, that I may encourage others. Since the Lord keeps his promises by fulfilling them, we ought to keep them by remembering them.

"I have said that I will keep thy words," and this especially includes the word which the Lord has pledged in his covenant. I will rejoice to think that thou hast by deed of gift made thyself over to me! How will I keep in mind thy word and oath pledged to the Lord Jesus on my behalf: how will I rejoice in the blood which ratified the covenant and in the covenant word itself. See what sea room I have in my topic, and yet I have merely coasted and skirted the shore: what boundless sailing room there would be if we were to launch out into the deep.

My brethren, pray for grace to keep every word of God with all your hearts. Do not believe, as some do, that it does not matter what is truth or what is falsehood. It makes all the difference conceivable. God's word against man's word any day in the week. I fear that the ancient power of Protestantism has evaporated through the influence of those who hold loose views upon inspiration, and who are busy manufacturing new gospels instead of preaching the old one which is

already in the word. The great thinkers may propound what they choose, and the learned men of this age may invent what doctrines they like, but one thing I know, they will not cause those who have God for their portion to give up his words. For these twenty-four years you have found me here preaching the words of God, and you will find me here still if I live another twenty-four years. By his grace I am incapable of moving one inch away from the old faith. One thing I know, namely, the gospel of substitution, and one thing I do, namely, preach it. I have determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified. When we get through all the words of God we will begin them again ; but we shall still keep to the old Book and its old, old story. The children shall go on eating their daily bread, and not even for novelty's sake will we give them the stones of modern thought.

Now, to conclude. This blessed subject very painfully suggests to me a solemn contrast. Will you at your leisure read concerning another portion which the Lord reserves for certain persons. God grant we may never inherit it. It is the portion of the hypocrites. In Matthew xxiv. 50, our Lord speaks very strongly of some, and I will tell you the reason why he deals so terribly with them. He says of some that "the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Do you know what this man had done ? He had not kept Christ's word. His Master had said that he would come, and he did not keep the word about his second coming, nor believe in it at all, but, according to the forty-eighth verse, he said, "My Lord delayeth his coming," and then he began to act upon it, to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink and to be drunken ; so that, not keeping what some think a very small matter, the word concerning the future coming of Christ, he was found to be a hypocrite and had his portion appointed with falsehearted pretenders. The same passage, with a little variation, comes in Luke xii. 46, where the unfaithful servant is said to have his "portion with unbelievers," which is equally to be dreaded. The threat seems most to apply to ministers and teachers of the word who are unfaithful to the truth. The condemned one was not a faithful and wise steward, and did not bring forth things new and old with which to feed his Master's servants, and he also doubted whether his Master would ever come to call him to account, and so he had his portion among unbelievers. It will be an awful thing for me and for any minister here, or any other teacher of the people, if we do not bring forth things new and old out of the gospel to give the saints their portion of meat in due season. If we keep the Lord's servants without their portion we shall be kept without our portion, or rather we shall have it, but it will be a portion of the most awful kind. This makes it solemn work for any of you who attempt to teach others. God grant that you may give forth a good portion—give out the things that are new—that is the gospel, which is always new ; and give out the old things, the antiquities of everlasting love and electing grace, bring them all forth in proportion lest ye be found at last to have been unbelievers.

We will finish when we duly note one more point, namely this, that if you do diligently keep God's words, and if it is the joy of your heart to

no common sorrow. Beyond all this, almost every day we have report of this one and that one in the membership and in the congregation going home. These dying ones are God's voices to us, and I should be unworthy of addressing you if I did not first hear them in the silence of my own soul, and then endeavour to interpret them to you. All these things bring to my mind the language of our text, "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return;" will they not have the same effect upon you? He that hath ears to hear let him hear.

My subject is one upon which it would be quite impossible to say anything new, since death is neither novel nor uncommon, for from the days of Abel until now it has honeycombed the earth with graves. Nor need I seek out elegancies of speech, for these would be incongruous with such a theme. When we speak of eternal things the less attempt we make at fine language the better; such solemn topics are most powerful when suffered to have their own natural voice and speak for themselves. Begone all trifling thoughts! Let the mind put off all gay apparel, and wear awhile the shroud. Instead of rising with gaiety, let the imagination bow with solemnity, for now we have to do with the dying chamber, and the grave, and the judgment throne. The blast of the archangel's trumpet is ringing in our ears, and we are to anticipate the day in which we shall receive our final sentence from the Judge of all the earth. Solemnity, therefore, should possess our minds. Let us shut out the present world and become familiar with the world to come. Very simple and self-evident will be the considerations which I shall set before you, but if already moved to a solemn frame of mind, you will be prepared to derive profit from them. May God the Holy Spirit bless the word, and by its means prepare us for our last remove, of which the text speaks so plainly.

First, then, let us *realize our inevitable journey*—"I shall go the way whence I shall not return." Secondly, let us *contemplate its nearness*—"When a few years are come." Thirdly, let us *consider our non-return from the journey*—"Whence I shall not return;" and then we shall close in the fourth place by *enquiring whither we are going*. We are going whence we shall not return, but to what place are we bound? Is it endless bliss or ceaseless woe?

I. First then let us **REALIZE OUR INEVITABLE JOURNEY**. I desire that these words may be earnestly taken up in a personal manner by each of us. The language is in the singular number. "*I shall go the way whence I shall not return*. Let us apply it each one to himself. The fact that all men are mortal has little power over our minds, for we always make a tacit exception and put off the evil day for ourselves. We own ourselves mortal, but do not expect to die just now. Even the aged look forward to a continuance of life, and the consumptive dream of possible recovery. I will not, therefore, remind you so much of the general truth, but place before you the individual, pointed, personal declaration of the text. "I," the preacher; you, each one of you looking upon the preacher now,—"*I shall go the way whence I shall not return*." As surely as you live you will die. It may help you to realise this fact if I ask you to accompany me first of all into the chamber of a *dying man*, and as you look upon him I entreat you to remember that you yourself will lie there in a like case ere long. It is sometimes my duty, and a

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OUR LAST JOURNEY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 9TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return."
Job xvi. 22.

THE season of the year may well remind us of our mortality. The corn, which a few weeks ago was green and vigorous, has now for the most part yielded to the sickle; many flowers which adorned our gardens have exchanged their bloom for ripening seed; the year has commenced to die, its glory and prime have gone. The dews of evening are heavy, and the mists linger in the morning, for the summer heat is declining. The leaves are just upon the turn, and the fall of the year is close at hand. These are creation's warnings, reminding us that the Lord hath set a harvest for us, and that we all do fade as a leaf. Nature hath her prophets as well as revelation, and autumn in his rugged garb is one of them. He has now come to us with this solemn message, "The harvest is passed and the summer is ended; prepare to meet your God!"

In addition to the warnings of nature, we have lately been saluted by voices from divine providence. Loud calls have come to us of late from almost every part of our church work. Death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces. Death, who seldom comes into the Orphanage, has forced his cruel hand into our nest of young ones, and has taken thence the widow's child. A funeral has left our gates, and little boys have gathered around a grave to see one like themselves laid in the silent earth. Death has set his axe also against the College, and has cut down one of our growing trees, upon which there were abundant tokens of future fruitfulness. Our brother Winter had sharpened his sword for the conflict, and was just about to leave us for actual service, when in a few days his strength departed, and he was not. Death has come also among the ministers who were once our students, and were our crown of rejoicing as labourers for the Lord. One of the ablest and best of them has put a whole town in mourning for he has been taken home at an early age, when he had already become foremost for usefulness. Middlesborough mourns our brother Pritter with

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great things of eternity, and cannot leave them to another. He used to hear about eternity as one of the mass, but now he has to experience it alone, and by himself. Into the cold river his own feet must descend, the cool waves must chill his blood, death must close his eye, and into the unknown future he must plunge alone. No brother's hand can grasp his hand when he has quitted the body, no fellow-mortal can fly side by side with him through the tracks unknown. How vividly the individuality of the man comes out, and the need of a personal interest in the great salvation. How much it is to be desired that it could be made quite as plain under happier circumstances. And yet how clear it is that each one of us must believe in the Saviour for himself, each serve God personally, and each have a good hope through grace wrought in his own soul. Will men never think of this till they come to die?

And now that candle burning in the sick man's chamber sheds a strange light upon his past life. Some said he was fortunate, but if he was sinful where is his good fortune? Men said he was a poor unsuccessful muddler, but he will be worth as much in a short time as if he had been the most prudent, and had prospered in the world, for here men come to a level. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked must I return thither." So must it be. In death the financial element looks contemptible, and *the moral and the spiritual come to be most esteemed*. How did he live? What were his thoughts? What was his heart towards God? Did he repent of sin? Does he still repent? Does he believe in Jesus? Is he resting upon the finished work of Christ or is he not? He, perhaps, failed to ask himself some of those questions a little while ago, but now, if he be in his sober senses, he is compelled to put his soul through its paces. How does his heart answer when cross-examined? Now he must reach down the accounts, the memoranda, and the day-book of his life, and he must look to what he did and what he was, and what he is. Ah me! how will the reckoning end? What will be the sum total? It matters little what he was before his fellow men, whose judgments are fallible, but the question is, what was he before the all-searching eye of the Most High God? Such an account *you* will have to render.

The individuality of the man is clear, and the man's character before God, and now it is also evident that *death tests all things*. If you look upon this poor dying man you see that he is past the time for pretences and shams. You yourself, if you knew but little of him before, feel very concerned to know whether the religion he professed was truthful or not, whether he was really regenerate or merely dreamed that he was so. If *you* wish to answer that question, how much more does that poor dying man want to know for himself? Here let me tell you that very much of the comfort with which we wrap ourselves up in days of health proves to be very sorry stuff when we come to die. While you are in good health and strength you often derive a measure of peace of mind from things which will not stand the fiery ordeal of an approaching eternity. Some of the best men that ever lived have found this out. You may know the name of Mr. Durham, the author of a famous book on Solomon's Song, one of the most earnest of Scotland's ancient preachers. Some days before he died he seemed to be in some perplexity about his future well-being, and said to his friend Mr. Carstairs, "Dear

brother, for all that I have written or preached, there is but one Scripture which I can now remember or dare grip unto now that I am hastening to the grave. It is this—'Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' Pray tell me if I dare lay the weight of my salvation upon it." Mr. Carstairs justly replied, "Brother, you may depend upon it, though you had a thousand salvations at hazard." You see it was a plain, sinner's text that he rested on. Just as Dr. Guthrie wanted them to sing a bairn's hymn, so do dying saints need the plain elementary doctrines of the gospel to rest upon. Those fine ideas and dainty notions of our nearing perfection and becoming completely sanctified dissolve like the hoar frost in the sun, when we come face to face with eternity. Those grand excitements, those high enjoyments, and those deep experiences, which lead us to think ourselves to be somebodies in the church of God are of small account in dying moments. Men cannot die on stilts. Death finds out the truth of our condition and blows away with his cold breath a heap of chaff which we thought to be good wheat. Then a man has to look to the mercy of God, to the blood of the covenant and to the promises of the gospel, and to cling as a poor needy, guilty sinner to free, rich, sovereign grace, or else his spirit will utterly sink. When life is ebbing nothing will do but the faithful saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I have heard children of God speak in their last moments just as seeking souls speak. They come to God again just as they came at first, and they find in Jesus all their hope. Dying men want realities, they want a sinner's Saviour, they want atonement for guilt, for so only can they pass out of the world with hope. Oh, brethren, follow after that which is solid and real, for nothing else will serve your turn when you come to die.

Still keep your eye on that dying man whom I have tried to picture—he is vividly before me now. He must go: there is no alternative. He cannot resist the power which now summons him to depart. Willing or unwilling, it matters not, *he must go*. The sheriff's officer has him in his grip, and *he must go*. Is he prepared? Pray God he may be; but whether he be so or not it makes no difference, he must leave all and take his journey. Has he children dependent upon him, and a wife who needs his support? Their necessities cannot detain him, *he must go*. Has he made his will, or has he left all his business affairs in a tangle? Whichever it is, *he must go*. The tide which bears all before it has seized his barque, and even now it drifts adown the stream.

That man who must go is yourself, projected only a little way further into time. Can you not realize what will certainly be the fact? Can you not already hear the ticking of the watch at your bed-head in the silence of your last night? Can you not anticipate that mysterious consultation of physicians, when each one owns to his fellows his incompetence to suggest a remedy. It is clear that the hour is come: you must go. This must happen to every mortal man and woman sitting or standing in this house this morning. Will you not lay it to heart?

Now survey another scene to help you to realize your departure. Look no longer on the dying, but bend over *the dead*. It is all over now. He has breathed his last, and he now lies upstairs alone in the darkened chamber. A loving one has stolen in and tremblingly

lifted the coffin lid to gaze once more upon the dear face, and say another adieu; but there can be no more of this. The friends have gathered, and the mourners must go through the streets and bear him to the tomb. *That funeral is yours.*

The corpse is borne to the grave, and on the road it silently preaches to all passers by. Archbishop Leighton one morning was asked by a friend, "Have you heard a sermon?" He said, "No, but I met a sermon, for I met a dead man carried out to be buried." Let every funeral be a discourse to you. Within a short time to each one of us it will happen that within the narrow limits of the coffin we must lie, and then will come for us the opened grave, the lowering of the corpse, and the gathering of mourners around it. Upon your coffin lid and mine the mould shall fall—"Earth to earth, dust to dust, and ashes to ashes." A green mound, a daisy or two amid the grass, a friend to bring a few fading flowers to scatter on our graves ever and anon; perhaps a head-stone, perhaps not,—to this we must all come. "Here he lies" is the universal epitaph. On the lap of earth *you* will lie; there shall I also lie. Do realize it; it is so near, so sure—when a few years shall come we shall be with the unnumbered throng.

Now let your realization go a little further. Can you picture the spirit of a man as it leaves the body? I confess my imagination does not enable me to picture it to myself, and certainly my words are not competent to convey to you what little I can realize to my mind. The soul finds itself rid of materialism; how will it feel when it has shaken itself loose of its shell of clay? I cannot tell. We all love this earthly home of our tabernacle, and leave it with reluctance.

"For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?"

But it does not matter what lingering looks we cast, our soul will have done with the body in its present fashion, and it must for a while dwell apart from all materialism. At once it must come before God. Its state will immediately after death be known to it beyond a question. In a moment it will know beyond all doubt whether it is accepted before God, and beyond all hope it will know whether it is reprobate and condemned. That knowledge will at once commence its happiness, a happiness which will be increased as ages roll on; or that knowledge will at once commence its misery, which will deepen evermore. The soul will abide in the disembodied state for a while, and then will come the clarion note of the resurrection trumpet, and the body shall rise again to be again inhabited by the soul. What will the meeting be? What will be the sensation of the remarriage of mind with matter, of soul with body? We know not. The resurrection is the blessed hope of the Christian, but it is a terrible dread to the ungodly. The soul shall never more return to the world's cares, nor to the world at all as the world now is, but it shall again inhabit the body, and stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the verdict from the lips of him who is appointed Judge of all mankind.

The divine verdict is given, and the soul must continue its journey.

Still onward must it go : whether accepted or condemned, onward it must go. Onward, exulting in a bliss unspeakable like to the divine, if Christ pronounce it blessed ; onward, in a misery unutterable if Christ pronounce it "cursed." I do not know whether you are able in imagination to place yourself in such a condition, but in such a condition you will certainly be found ere long. You will be stripped of this house of clay, and so you will die, but you will live again, ay, live for ever. You will live to be judged, to be justified or to be condemned, and then you will live for ever, in happiness or torment, *and all this you will know in a short time to come.*

Thus I have helped you as best I could, and I fear but poorly, to realize the inevitable journey.

II. Now, let us very briefly CONTEMPLATE ITS MEANING. Very soon we shall have to start upon our solemn and mysterious pilgrimage. If we should fulfil the entire tale of our years the allotted period of human life is but short. The text in the Hebrew speaks of "years of number": they are so few that a child may count them. At the commencement of life the view before us looks like an endless avenue, but as we advance along the path the end seems very near, and we perceive how short our time is. Middle life has but a short view, either backwards or forwards. As for some of you, upon whom age is descending, you should be well enough aware how short for certain your time for lingering here must be. Your lease has almost run out ; can you doubt it ?

What are seventy or eighty years, if we live so long ? But then we are further warned by the consideration that we cannot safely reckon upon the whole of that brief period, for children are carried away and young men are cut down by the scythe ; and we see frequently the maiden before she reaches the full bloom of her years carried off, with death as her bridegroom. Does not the text say, "a few years" Read it months, read it days, read it hours, read it minutes, for we cannot tell how soon we must set sail for the far-off land. In a short time we must join the great caravan, and cross the desert to a land whence we shall not return. Life is so short, that we have scarce begun to live ere we are called to die.

Hence, dear brethren, if there is anything grievous to be borne, we may well bear it cheerfully, for it cannot last long. When a few years are come we shall be gone from the thorn and the briar which now prick and wound. Hence, too, if there is any work to be done for Jesus let us do it at once, or else we shall never do it, for when a few years are come we shall have gone whence we shall not return. Hence, too, if there be salvation to be sought let us seek it, for soon we shall be where salvation is no more proclaimed. Hence, again, if worldly goods are possessed by us let us hold them very loosely, for in a short time we must leave them. Let us lay them out for God's glory, for our stewardship will not last for long, and we shall soon have to give an account. Hence, above all things, the need of being always prepared to die. Oh, brothers, he who is to die next had need be ready. Who is he ? An old man who used to sell goods from house to house had an eccentric cry of his own, which he was wont to utter whenever he sold goods at the door. He would cry out aloud, "Who'll be the next ? Who'll be the next ?" One day a funeral passed just as he had given out his usual

cry, and strange enough sounded the question—"Who'll be the next?" I may ask with solemn emphasis whenever the cemetery's gates are opened, and the funeral passes through, "Who will be the next? Who will be the next?" Your hymn says, "Who will be the next to follow Jesus?" but I must ask this morning, "Who will be the next among us to be carried to the silent tomb?" To be ready to depart is wisdom. It is the mark of the beast that it looks not beyond the present mouthful of grass which it crops from the sward; it never thinks of the butcher's knife and the shambles. Be not as the brutes which perish, but, being gifted with minds, use them to look before you. It is the mark of the fool that he never looks before he leaps, but is content with present enjoyments though they leave him penniless. Be not as the fool, but be prudent and look before you, and consider your latter end. It is the mark of the worldling that he confines his thoughts within the narrow range of time: the Christian looks into the everlasting future as an immortal being should do. Be not worldlings, lest ye perish with them.

May God make you wise unto salvation! To be prepared to die is an immediate duty, will you neglect it? Some imagine that to be prepared to die would involve a life of perpetual gloom. If it did so it were well to face it. When a man comes to die and finds himself prepared, even if he had endured fifty years of perpetual anguish of heart, and had denied himself every worldly comfort, he would think himself well repaid to have the prospect of a blessed future. Heaven at any price is well secured. A good hope through grace is worth a thousand worlds. But it is a mistake to suppose that melancholy attends upon fitness to die. Why should it? To be unprepared for death, and to know that it may come at any moment, is a fair reason for sadness, but to have that great matter secure must surely be a source of joy. To be prepared to die is to be prepared to live; to be ready for eternity is in the best sense to be ready for time. Who so fit to live on earth as the man who is fit to live in heaven? Who hath brightness of the eye? Is it not the man who has looked within the gate of pearl, and seen his place prepared among the blessed? Who hath lightness of heart? Is it not the man who is unloaded of his sin, and has found mercy through the blood of Christ? Who can go to his bed and sleep in peace and wake with joy—who but the man that is reconciled to God by the death of his Son? Who hath the best of this world as well as the world to come? Is it not he to whom death has now become a changed thing, a cherub that has lost its way—no longer destruction, but rather development, and admission into a higher and nobler life? Since readiness for death is peace and happiness, and is above measure needful in prospect of the eternal state, let us see to it at once. We are to be gone so soon let us gird up our loins for our solemn journey. There is no time to spare. The end is drawing near. Every flying moment is hastening on our last hour. It is high time to awake out of sleep, and in earnest make ready to meet the Bridegroom, who is already on his way.

III. Now, thirdly, I want you to CONSIDER THE FACT THAT WE SHALL NOT RETURN—"When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return." To the occupations of life—to sow and reap, and mow; to the abodes of life—to the store and to the country house; to the pleasures of life,—the festival and the family,

we shall not return. To the engagements of the sanctuary, the communion table, the pulpit, or the pew, we shall not return. To the chamber of love, to the hearth of affection, to the walk of friendship, we shall not return. To hopes and fears, and joys, and pains, we shall not return. To summer's flowers and winter's snows we shall not return. To our brothers, children, husband, or wife, we shall not return. To nothing that is done under the sun shall we return. Soul, unsaved soul, to the land of the gospel and the mercy seat thou shalt not return. If you die unsaved you will not be able to come back to the house of God to hear again the ministry of reconciliation ; you will hear no more invitations and expostulations, neither will Jesus be set before you as your hope. You will not be able to come back to the prayer meeting and to the earnest entreaties of a godly mother and other loving friends, nor even back to your Bible and to the opportunity of searching it that you may find eternal life. You will not return to find space for repentance, nor a second opportunity for prayer, nor another season for believing in Jesus. It shall be said concerning you, "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still." Where the tree falleth there must it lie. Once pass the barriers of life unsaved, and ye cannot return to a new probation. The die is cast.

Beloved Christian friends, we need not wish to return. What is there here that should either tempt us to stay in this world or induce us to return to it if we could? Still, I could suppose in a future state some reasons for wishing to return. I can suppose we might have it in our hearts, for instance, to wish to undo the mischief which we did in life. If a dying man should receive mercy in his last moments, one might imagine him as desiring to return to earth to tell the glad tidings and beseech his family and friends to seek salvation. Who would not wish for once to plead with his children if he felt that he had neglected his duty to them. A man might wish, even if he were in the unquenchable flame, to come back to earth or to send a messenger, as the rich man did, to tell his brethren, lest they should come into the place of torment. Selfishness might wish to be spared the reproaches of those we helped to ruin. But you cannot come back or send back to undo your ill deeds. Therefore seek to mend matters now. Avoid the doing of evil, and as for that which is already done, confess it before God, and seek to administer the antidote by an earnest and godly life.

You cannot come back to carry out those good resolutions, which as yet are as unripe fruit. Young man, you mean to do good some day, do you not? You have it in your heart to lead a grand life. Well, you must do it now, for you cannot come back to revise your conduct ; it will not be possible to correct and amend it, for death stereotypes all. After death you cannot return to develop your promises into performances. Therefore bestir yourself betimes. We shall not be able to come back to finish the work we have begun ; the half-built house will never be completed by our labour. We have many projects which are but half developed, we had better proceed with them or they will never be completed. If we leave our ships on the stocks we shall not be able to return to launch them. When our lives below are at an end we have reached the finis of our earthly career.

Neither can we come back to rectify any mistake we have made

in our life-work, nor even return to look after it, in order to preserve that which was good in it. I sometimes think if I were in heaven I should almost wish to visit my work at the Tabernacle, to see whether it will abide the test of time and prosper when I am gone. Will you keep to the truth? Will you hold to the grand old doctrines of the gospel? Or will this church, like so many others, go astray from the simplicity of its faith, and set up gaudy services and false doctrine? Methinks I should turn over in my grave if such a thing could be. God forbid it! But there will be no coming back, and therefore we must build well, rejecting all wood, hay and stubble, using nothing but gold, silver, and precious stones. We must build quickly to get the work done, but fast as we labour we must do it surely and honestly and thoroughly, for the fire will try it when we are gone. It will be a pity that our work should suffer loss, even though we ourselves should be saved. We cannot return to save the burning mass, nor to rebuild the ruin, but we shall, doubtless, see and know what comes of it. "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

Therefore, dear brother, if your hand findeth anything to do, do it at once with all your might. If your heart suggests anything that should be done, let it be done at once: see to the bringing up of your children, the conversion of your neighbours, the laying out of your talents for Christ, the consecration of your substance, the propagation of the precious truth which has been revealed to you. If a good work is to be done, do it! Do it, do it once. The curfew of time is sounding. Your own vesper bell is ringing out, and these are the words which I set to its music—"What thou doest do quickly, for when a few years are come, thou must go whither thou wilt not return." Again I say, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

IV. And now, lastly, let us ENQUIRE WHITHER WE SHALL GO? In some respects it happeneth alike to all, for all go upon the long journey. All go to the grave, which is the place of all living. It matters very little where our grave shall be, whether beneath a weeping willow or in the solemn deeps: the best of all, I think, that can happen to any of us is to be laid where we shall quickly moulder into the common earth, that none may afterwards profane our bones; but if they do, what matters it? we shall know nothing of it, and precious in the sight of the Lord will our dust be, though it be trodden under foot or blown of the winds. We shall all die, and then we shall all pass into the disembodied state. But of what character shall my death be and where shall I spend the time of waiting? May I urge upon you to ask yourselves this question? May I press a second enquiry upon you? If at this very instant you were to leave your body where would your soul be? You may know very readily. Where does it delight to be now? I once visited an aged Christian woman who said to me when she was near death, "Sir, I do not think that God will appoint me my portion with the ungodly, for I could never bear their company; and I do hope I shall be among his people, though I am very unworthy, for I never was so happy as when I was with them." Yes, you will keep the same company for ever. The sheep shall be with the sheep, and the goats with the goats. Your delight prophesies your destiny. What you have chosen here shall be your portion hereafter.

The scoffer, the drunkard, the liar, the unchaste shall be your comrades in hell if they were so here. If you love sin you shall be steeped up to the throat in it, and it shall burn around you like liquid fire. If you have loved the wages of unrighteousness, you shall receive them in full tale, for the wages of sin is death, and death shall rage about you and gnaw you with his undying worm. But if your delights have been with your God, you shall dwell with him. If you have rejoiced in Christ Jesus, you shall reign with him, and if you have loved his people, you shall abide with them for ever. Your disembodied state shall be spent either with Christ and his people or with sin and sinners. If not in paradise with Jesus, you know where you must lie. Did not our Lord himself tell us of the great gulf which cannot be passed, and of the torment of those upon the other side. *You* may know it all before you clock strikes again. Do think of it and tremble.

Then, as I have already stated, we shall all go forward in our journey towards resurrection. We shall, every one of us, stand in the latter day upon the earth. To the righteous this is the greatest joy. "I know that my next of kin still liveth, and though after my skin worms devour this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Oh, blessed hope, it were worth while to die with this in prospect. A child of God who died not long ago said to one who stood by, "I have enjoyed more in the two hours I have been dying than in the fifty years that I was living. It is so blessed a thing to die, for I have a clear prospect of the resurrection. But, oh, to have no blessed resurrection before you, but instead thereof the certainty of rising to shame and to everlasting contempt; rising so that both body and soul may be cast into hell, till the tongue that now dares to curse will ask in vain for a drop of water to cool its burnings, and every limb shall be made to suffer because it yielded itself up to be an instrument of unrighteousness and of rebellion against God. Which shall your resurrection be—a blessing or a horror? God help you to decide. Yea, may the Holy Ghost so work upon your heart and will that you may lay hold on Jesus at once and find eternal life in him.

Speedily shall come the great and terrible scene of the judgment, when all that are in the earth and in the sea shall stand before the great white throne. What an assemblage! These mighty gatherings in the Tabernacle, and the crowds we hear of on great festival days, are but as a drop in a bucket compared with the innumerable hordes of men that shall spring up from their graves when the last trumpet soundeth. If you can think of anything, then, besides your Judge, you will cast your eye as far as you can see, and over hill and dale you will see myriads of our race. Men have been so numerous a host that they will cover every speck of earth; yea, and the sea itself shall yield for once a solid basis for them to stand upon, and all shall teem like a hive when the bees swarm around it, the world shall appear black with the multitude of men. And what a sight when the Assessor shall sit upon his throne, and he shall begin to divide them as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. To the right! To the left! Blessed! Cursed! Come! Depart! Oh, the terror of that voice which shall pronounce a separate sentence upon each of the two great classes into which the population of earth shall then be divided. On which side would you be if now, instead of this poor voice saluting your ears, there should suddenly be a trans-

formation scene, and Christ should sit upon his throne, and you be there and I be there to be judged before him?

And then, after the judgment cometh the end, but what then? Do not flatter yourselves with the idea, ye ungodly, that ye shall be annihilated. You have chosen sin, you have deliberately rejected Christ, and if you continue to do so you have settled your own destiny, and settled it for ever. Look the danger in the face like honest men, and then escape from the wrath to come.

But if you believe in Jesus now, look your future in the face and rejoice, for your redemption draweth nigh. See body and soul together, and both perfect, and Christ the Judge acquitting you, and saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." Can you conceive your overflowing joy, your ecstatic delight? The presence of angels, the fellowship of perfect saints, the sight of your Saviour, near communion with your God, and all this for ever and for ever! Why, methinks it makes me willing to use my solemn text no longer as a dirge, but as a sonnet, and say right joyously, "When a few years are come, I shall go whence I shall not return, nor ever wish to return, but shall be for ever with the Lord." Amen, so let it be.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xc.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.”

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPT. 16TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“So shall we ever be with the Lord.”—1 Thessalonians iv. 17

WE know that these words are full of consolation, for the apostle says in the next verse, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” The very words it appears were dictated by the Holy Spirit the Comforter, to be repeated by the saints to each other with the view of removing sorrow from the minds of the distressed. The comfort is intended to give us hope in reference to those who have fallen asleep. Look over the list of those, beloved in the Lord, who have departed from you, to your utmost grief, and let the words of our text be a handkerchief for your tears. Sorrow not as those that are without hope, for they are with the Lord though they are not with you, and by-and-by you shall surely meet them where your Lord is the centre of fellowship for ever and ever. The separation will be very transient; the reunion will be everlasting. These words are also intended to comfort the saints with regard to themselves, and I pray that they may be a cordial to any who are sick with fear, a matchless medicine to charm away the heartache from all believers. The fact that you bear about a dying body is very evident to some of you by your frequent and increasing infirmities and pains, and this, it may be, is a source of depression of spirits. You know that when a few years are gone you must go the way whence you shall not return; but be not dismayed, for you shall not go into a strange country alone and unattended. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, who will not fail you nor forsake you; and, moreover, you are going home; your Lord will be with you while you are departing, and then you will be ever with him. Therefore, though sickness warn thee of the near approach of death, be not in the least dismayed; though pain and weariness should make thy heart and flesh fail, yet doubt not of thy triumph through the Redeemer's blood; though it should sometimes make thy flesh to tremble when thou rememberest thy many sins and the weakness of thy faith, yet be of good cheer, for thy sins and weakness of faith will soon be removed far from thee, and thou shalt be in his

presence where there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore. Comfort yourselves, then, both with regard to those who have gone before and in reference to the thought of your own departure.

Observe that the comfort which the apostle here presents to us may be partly derived from the fact of the resurrection, but not chiefly; for he does not so much refer to the words "The dead in Christ shall rise," as to these last—"so shall we ever be with the Lord." It is a great truth that you will rise again; it is a sweeter truth that you will be "ever with the Lord." There is some consolation also in the fact that we shall meet our departed brethren when we all shall be caught up together in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. Blissful will be the general assembling of the redeemed, never again to be broken up; the joy of meeting never to part again is a sweet remedy for the bitterness of separation. There is great comfort in it, but the main stress of consolation does not lie even there. It is pleasant to think of the eternal fellowships of the godly above, but the best of all is the promised fellowship with our Lord,—“So shall we ever be with the Lord.” Whatever else you draw comfort from, neglect not this deep, clear, and overflowing well of delight. There are other sources of good cheer in connection with the glory to be revealed, for heaven is a many-sided joy; but still none can excel the glory of communion with Jesus Christ, wherefore comfort one another in the first place, and most constantly, with these words, “So shall we ever be with the Lord.”

I shall view our text, in order to our comfort at this time, in three lights. I look upon it, first, as a *continuance*—we are with the Lord even now, and we ever shall be: secondly, as an *advancement*—we shall ere long be more fully with the Lord than we are now: and thirdly, as a *coherence*—for we both are and shall be with him in a close and remarkable manner.

I. I regard the text as A CONTINUANCE of our present spiritual state—"So shall we ever be with the Lord." To my mind, and I think I am not incorrect in so expounding, the apostle means that nothing shall prevent our continuing to be ever with the Lord; death shall not separate us, nor the terrors of that tremendous day when the voice of the archangel and the trump of God shall be heard; by divine plan and arrangement all shall be so ordained that "So shall we ever be with the Lord." By being caught up into the clouds, or in one way or another, our abiding in Christ shall remain unbroken. As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so shall we walk in him, whether in life or in death.

I understand him to mean that we are with the Lord now, and that nothing shall separate us from him. Even now like Enoch we walk with God, and we shall not be deprived of divine communion. Our fear might be that in the future state something might happen which would become a dividing gulf between us and Christ, but the apostle assures us that it will not be so, there shall be such plans and methods used that "so shall we ever be with the Lord." At any rate, I know that, if this be not the truth here intended, it is a truth worthy to be expounded, and therefore I do not hesitate to enlarge upon it.

We are with the Lord *in this life* in a high spiritual sense. Read you

not, in the epistle to the Colossians, "for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God"? Were you not "buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead"? Do you not know what it is to be dead to the world in him, and to be living a secret life with him? Are you not risen with Christ; ay, and do you not understand in some measure what it is to be raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus? If you are not with him, brethren, you are not Christians at all, for this is just the mark of the Christian, that he follows with Christ. It is essential to salvation to be a sheep of Christ's fold, nay more, a partaker of Christ's life, a member of his mystical body, a branch of the spiritual vine. Separated from him we are spiritually dead: he himself has said, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Jesus is not far from any one of his people; nay, it is our privilege to follow him whithersoever he goeth, and his loving word to us is, "Abide in me, and I in you." May he enable us sweetly to realize this. We are, dear brethren, constantly with Christ in the sense of abiding union with him, for we are joined unto the Lord, and are one spirit. Sometimes this union is very sweetly apparent to ourselves; "We know that we are in him that is true," and in consequence we feel an intense joy, even Christ's own joy fulfilled in us. For the same reason we are at times bowed down with intense sorrow; for being in and with Christ we have fellowship with him in his sufferings, being made conformable with his death: this is such sweet sorrow that the more we experience it the better.

"Live or die, or work or suffer,
Let my weary soul abide,
In all changes whatsoever,
Sure and stedfast by thy side.

"Nothing can delay my progress,
Nothing can disturb my rest,
If I shall, where'er I wander,
Lean my spirit on thy breast."

This companionship is, we trust, made manifest to others by its fruits. It ought always so to be: the life of the Christian should be manifestly a life with Christ. Men should take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him; they should see that there is something in us which could not have been there if it were not for the Son of God: a temper, a spirit, a course of life, which could not have come by nature but must have been wrought in us through grace which has been received from him in whom dwells a fulness of grace, even our Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, if we are what we ought to be, our life is spent in conscious communion, growing out of continued union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and if it be so we have that rich assurance which is written by the beloved John, "If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father."

We are with him, dear friends, in this sense too, that his unchanging love is always set upon us, and our love, feeble though it sometimes may

be, never quite dies out. In both senses that challenge of the apostle is true, "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" We can say, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me;" and, on the other hand, we also testify, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." He claims us and we claim him: he loves us and we love him. There is a union of heart between us. We are with him, not against him; we are in league with him, enlisted beneath his banner, obedient to his Spirit. For us to live is Christ: we have no other aim.

He is with us by the continued indwelling of the Holy Ghost, who is with us and shall be in us for ever. His anointing abideth on us, and because of it we abide in Christ Jesus. He has sent us the Comforter to represent himself, and through that divine Paraclete he continues to be with us, and so even now we are ever with the Lord.

Our Lord has also promised to be with us whenever we are engaged in his work. That is a grand word of encouragement, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Think not, therefore, that it will be the first time of our being with Christ when we shall see him in glory, for even now he manifests himself unto us as he does not unto the world. Has he not often fulfilled his promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"? We have heard the sound of our Master's feet behind us when we have been going on his errands; we have felt the touch of his hand when we have come to the forefront of the battle for his sake, and we have known that he dwelleth in us by his Spirit, and is with us by the power wherewith he has attended our work, and the deeds which he has wrought by the gospel which we have proclaimed. The Lord Jesus is with his church in her tribulation for his name's sake, and he will ever be so, for he forsaketh not his saints. "Fear not, I am with thee," is as much a word of the Lord under the gospel as in Old Testament times. By the power of his blessed Spirit Jesus abides with us, and through this present dispensation he enables us to be "ever with the Lord."

But, my brethren, the time is coming when *we shall die*, unless the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout meanwhile. Assuredly in the article of death we shall still be with the Lord.

"Death may my soul divide
From this abode of clay;
But love shall keep me near thy side
Through all the gloomy way."

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." This makes dying such delicious work to the people of God, for then especially is Jesus seen to be near. By death they escape from death, and henceforth it is no more death for them to die. When Jesus meets his saints there seems no iron gate to pass through, but in a moment they close their eyes on earth and open them in glory. Beloved, there should be no more bondage through fear of death, since Christ attends his people even in their descent into the tomb, and strengthens them upon the bed of languishing. This has been a great joy to many departing saints. A dying believer, who was attended by a physician who was also a child of God, was observed to be whispering

to himself while dying, and his good attendant, wishing to know what were his last words, placed his ear against the dying man's lips, and heard him repeating to himself again and again the words, "For ever with the Lord, For ever with the Lord." When heart and flesh were failing, the departing one knew that God was the strength of his life and his portion for ever, and so he chose for his soft, low-whispered, dying song,—“For ever with the Lord.”

After death, we shall abide awhile in the separate, disembodied state, and we shall know as to our soul what it is to be still with the Lord; for what saith the apostle? “Knowing that when we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord.” The dying thief was to be that day with Christ in paradise, and such shall be our lot as soon as our souls shall have passed out of this tenement of clay into that wondrous state of which we know so little. Our pure spirits shall “come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Who is dismayed when such a prospect opens up before him?

Ay, and this body which shall fall asleep, though apparently it shall be destroyed, yet shall it not be so, but it shall only slumber awhile, and then awake again and say, “When I awake I am still with thee.” Constantly death is described as sleeping in Jesus: that is the state of the saint's mortal frame through the interregnum between death and resurrection. The angels shall guard our bodies; all that is essential to complete the identity of our body shall be securely preserved, so that the very seed which was put into the earth shall rise again in the beauty of efflorescence which becomes it: all, I say, that is essential shall be preserved intact, because it is still with Christ. It is a glorious doctrine which is stated by the apostle in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the fifth chapter, at the ninth and tenth verses, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”

In due time the last trump shall sound and *Christ shall come*, but the saints shall be with him. The infinite providence has so arranged that Christ shall not come without his people, for “Them also that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him.” The saints shall be with him in the advent as they are now. Our souls shall hear the shout of victory and join in it; the voice of the archangel shall be actually heard by all his redeemed, and the trump of God shall be sounded in the hearing of every one of his beloved, for we shall be with Jesus all through that glorious transaction. Whatever the glory and splendour of the second advent, we shall be with Jesus in it. I am not going to give you glimpses of the revealed future, or offer any suggestion as to the sublime history which is yet to be written, but most certainly there is to be a last general judgment, and then we shall be with Christ, assessors with him at that day. Being ourselves first acquitted, we shall take our seat upon the judgment bench with him. What saith the Holy Ghost by the

apostle—"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" The fallen angels, to their shame, shall in part receive the verdict of their condemnation from the lips of men, and thus vengeance shall be taken upon them for all the mischief they have done to the sons of men. Oh, think of it: amidst the terror of the tremendous day you shall be at ease, resting in the love of God, and beholding the glory of Christ, and "so shall you ever be with the Lord."

There is, moreover, to be a reign of Christ. I cannot read the Scriptures without perceiving that there is to be a millennial reign, as I believe, upon the earth, and that there shall be new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Well, whatever that reign is to be, we shall reign also. "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." He shall reign, but it will be "before his ancients gloriously." We shall be partakers in the splendours of the latter days, whatever they may be, and "So shall we ever be with the Lord."

The particular incident of the text does not exhaust the words, but you may apply them to the whole story of God's own children. From the first day of the spiritual birth of the Lord's immortals, until they are received up into the seventh heaven to dwell with God, their history may be summed up in these words, "So shall we ever be with the Lord." Whether caught up into the clouds or here below on this poor afflicted earth, in paradise or in the renovated earth, in the grave or in the glory, we shall ever be with the Lord. And when cometh the end, and God alone shall reign, and the mediatorial kingdom shall cease, ages, ages, and ages shall revolve, but "so shall we ever be with the Lord." The saints immortal shall be with their covenant Head, and like him free from sorrow. All tendency to sin shall be gone, and all fear of change or death; their intimate communion will last on for ever:—

"Blessed state! beyond conception!
Who its vast delights can tell?
May it be my blissful portion,
With my Saviour there to dwell."

I think the text looks like a continuation of what is already begun, only rising to something higher and better. To be with Christ is life eternal: this we have already, and shall continue to have, and "so shall we ever be with the Lord."

II. Secondly, most assuredly, brethren, the text is A GREAT ADVANCEMENT—"So shall we ever be with the Lord."

It is an advancement upon this present state, for however spiritual minded we may be, and however in consequence thereof we may be very near unto our Lord Jesus, yet still we know that while we are present in the body we are absent from the Lord. This life, at its very best, is still comparatively an absence from the Lord, but in the world to come we shall be more perfectly at home. Now we cannot in the highest sense be with Christ, for we must, according to the apostle's phraseology, "depart,

and be with Christ ; which is far better " ; but there we shall be for ever beholding his face unveiled. Earth is not heaven, though the believer begins the heavenly life while he is upon it. We are not with Christ as to place, nor as to actual sight, but in the glory-land we shall be.

And it is an advancement, in the next place, upon the present state of the departed, for though their souls are with the Lord yet their bodies are subject to corruption. Still does the sepulchre contain the blessed dust of the fathers of our Israel, or scattered to the four winds of heaven the martyr's ashes are with us still. The glorified saints are not as yet consciously " with the Lord " as to their complete manhood, but when the grand event shall occur of which Paul speaks, the body shall be reanimated. This is our glorious hope. We can say with the patriarch Job—" For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me." Know ye not, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ? That is, as they are ; but this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, and then shall the entire manhood, the perfected manhood, the fully developed manhood, of which this manhood is as it were but a shrivelled seed, be in the fullest and divinest sense for ever with the Lord. This is an advancement even upon the present paradisiacal state of departed saints.

And now let us consider what this glorious condition is to which we shall be advanced. We shall be with the Lord in the strongest possible meaning of that language. So with him that we shall never mind earthly things again, shall have no more to go into city business, or into the workshop, or into the field ; we shall have nought to do but to be engaged for ever with him in such occupations as shall have no tendency to take us off from communion with him. We shall be so with him as to have no sin to becloud our view of him : the understanding will be delivered from all the injury which sin has wrought in it, and we shall know him even as we are known. We shall see him as a familiar friend, and sit with him at his marriage feast. We shall be with him so as to have no fear of his ever being grieved and hiding his face from us again. We shall never again be made to cry out in bitterness of spirit, " Oh, that I knew where I might find him." We shall always know his love, always return it, and always swim in the full stream of it, enjoying it to the full. There will be no lukewarmness to mar our fellowship. He shall never have to say to us, " I would thou wert either cold or hot." There shall be no weariness to suspend our ceaseless bliss : we shall never have to cease from fellowship with him, because our physical frame is exhausted through the excessive joy of our heart ; the vessel will be strengthened to hold the new wine. No doubts shall intrude into our rest, neither doctrinal doubts nor doubts about our interest in him, for we shall be so consciously with him as to have risen ten thousand leagues above that gloomy state. We shall know that he is ours, for his left hand shall be under our head and his right hand shall embrace us, and we shall be with him beyond all hazard of any remove from him. The chief blessedness seems to me to lie in this, that we shall be with him and with him always. Now we are with the Lord in conscious

enjoyment sometimes, and then we are away from him, but there it will be constant, unwavering fellowship. No break shall ever occur in the intimate communion of the saints with Christ. Here we know that our high days and bright Sabbaths, with their sweetest joys, must have their eventides, and then come the work-days with the burden of the week upon them; but there the Sabbath is eternal, the worship endless, the praise unceasing, the bliss unbounded. "For ever with the Lord." Speak ye of a thousand years of reigning? What is that compared with "for ever with the Lord"? The millennium is little compared with "for ever"—a millennium of millenniums would be nothing to it. There can come no end to us and no end to our bliss, since there can be no end to him—"because I live, ye shall live also."

"For ever with the Lord"—What will it mean? I remember a sermon upon this text by a notable preacher, of which the heads were as follows—"For ever life, for ever light, for ever love, for ever peace, for ever rest, for ever joy." What a chain of delights! What more can heart imagine or hope desire? Carry those things in your mind and you will get, if you can drink into them, some idea of the blessedness which is contained in being for ever with the Lord; but still recollect these are only the fruits, and not the root of the joy. Jesus is better than all these. His company is more than the joy which comes out of it. I do not care so much for "life for ever," nor for "light for ever," as I do for "for ever with the Lord." Oh, to be with him! I ask no other bliss, and cannot imagine aught more heavenly. Why, the touch of the hem of his garment healed the sick woman; the sight of him was enough to give life to us when we were dead! What, then, must it be to be with him actually, consciously, and always? to be with him no more by faith, but in very deed with him for ever? My soul is ready to swoon away with too much joy as she drinks even in her shallow measure into the meaning of this thought, and I dare not venture further. I must leave you to muse your souls into it, for it needs quiet thought and room for free indulgence of holy imagination till you make your soul to dream of this excess of joy. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit."

"O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God;
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of my soul."

We love to think of being with Jesus under the aspect which the text specially suggests to us. We are to be for ever with the Redeemer, not as Jesus the Saviour only, but as *the Lord*. Here we have seen him on the cross and lived thereby; we are with him now in his cross-bearing and shame, and it is well; but our eternal companionship with him will enable us to rejoice in him *as the Lord*. What said our Master in his blessed prayer? "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." It will be heaven to us to be for ever with him as the Lord. Oh, how we shall delight to obey him as our Lord! How we shall triumph as we see what a lord he is over all the universe! and what a conqueror he is

over all his enemies! He will be more and more the Lord to us as we see all things put under him. We shall for ever hail him as King of kings, and Lord of lords. How we will adore him there when we see him in his glory. We do worship him now, and are not ashamed to believe that the Man of Nazareth is "very God of very God:" but oh, how his deity will shine upon us with infinite effulgence when we come to be near him. Thanks be to his name, we shall be strengthened to endure the sight, and we shall rejoice to see ourselves in the full blaze of his glory. Then shall we see what our poet endeavoured to describe when he said—

"Adoring saints around him stand,
And thrones and powers before him fall;
The God shines gracious through the Man,
And sheds sweet glories on them all."

We shall be for ever with the Lord, and his Lordship shall be most upon our minds. He has been raised into glory and honour, and is no more able to suffer shame.

"No more the bloody spear,
The cross and nails no more;
For hell itself shakes at his word,
And all the heavens adore."

III. Now we come to our third point, and shall consider what, for want of a better word, I entitle A COHERENCE. Those who are acquainted with the Greek language know that the "*with*" here is not *meta*, which signifies being in the same place with a person, but *sun*, which goes very much further, and implies a coherence, the two who are with each other are intimately connected. Let me show you what I mean. We are to be for ever with the Lord: now, the Christian's life is all along like the life of his Lord, and so it is a life with Christ. He was in all things with his brethren, and grace makes us to be with him. Just hurriedly look at your spiritual experience and your Lord's life, and see the parallel. When you were new born as a Christian you were born as Jesus Christ was, for you were born of the Holy Ghost. What happened after that? The devil tried to destroy the new life in you, just as Herod tried to kill your Lord: you were with Christ in danger, early and imminent. You grew in stature and in grace, and while yet grace was young, you staggered those who were about you with the things you said, and did, and felt, for they could not understand you; even thus when he went up to the temple our Lord amazed the doctors who gathered around him. The Spirit of God rested upon you, not in the same measure, but still as a matter of fact it did descend upon you as it did upon your Lord. You have been with him in Jordan's stream, and have received the divine acknowledgment that you are indeed the son of God. Your Lord was led into the wilderness to be tempted; and you too have been tempted of the devil. You have been with the Lord all along, from the first day until now. If you have been by grace enabled to live as you should, you have trodden the separated path with Jesus; you have been in the world, but not of it, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Therefore you have been despised; you have had to take your share of being unknown and

misrepresented, because you are even as he was in the world. "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." As he was here to serve, you have been with him as a servant, you have carried his yoke and counted it an easy load. You have been crucified to the world with him: you know the meaning of his cross, and delight to bear it after him. You are dead to the world with him, and wish to be as one buried to it. You have already in your measure partaken of his resurrection, and are living in newness of life. Your life-story is still to be like the life-story of your Lord, only painted in miniature. The more you watch the life of Christ the more clearly you will see the life of a spiritual man depicted in it, and the more clearly will you see what the saints' future will be. You have been with Christ in life, and you will be with him when you come to die. You will not die the expiatory death which fell to his lot, but you will die feeling that "it is finished," and you will breathe out your soul, saying, "Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit."

Then our Lord went to paradise, and you will go there too. You shall enjoy a sojourn where he spent his interval in the disembodied state. You shall be with him, and like him, and then like him you shall rise when your third morning cometh. "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise." You shall also ascend as Christ did. Do you catch the thought? How did he ascend? In clouds. "A cloud received him out of their sight," and a cloud shall receive you. You shall be caught up into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall you be ever with the Lord, in the sense of being like to him, walking with him in experience, and passing through the like events. That likeness shall continue for ever and for ever. Our lives shall run parallel with that of our Lord.

Think then, beloved, we are to be like Christ as to our character: we are to be with the Lord by sharing his moral and spiritual likeness. Conformed to his image, we shall be adorned with his beauty. When the mother of Darius saw two persons entering her pavilion, she being a prisoner bowed to the one whom she supposed to be Alexander. It turned out to be Hyphestion, the King's favourite. Upon discovering that it was Hyphestion the lady humbly begged Alexander's pardon for paying obeisance to the wrong person, but Alexander answered, "You have not mistaken, Madam, for he also is Alexander," meaning that he loved him so much that he regarded him as his other self. Our Lord looks on his beloved as one with himself, and makes them like himself. You remember, brethren, how John bowed down before one of his fellow servants, the prophets in heaven. It was a great blunder to make, but I dare say you and I will be likely to make the same, for the saints are so like their Lord. Know ye not that "we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is"? Christ will rejoice to see them all covered with the glory which his Father has given him. He will not be ashamed to call them brethren. Those poor people of his, who were so full of infirmity, and mourned over it so much, they shall be so like him that they shall be at once seen to be his brethren. Where shall such favoured ones be found?

We shall be with him in the sense that we shall be partakers of all

the blessedness and glory which our adorable Lord now enjoys. We shall be accepted together with him. Is he the beloved of the Lord? Does his Father's heart delight in him, as well it may? Behold ye also shall be called Hephzibah, for his delight shall be in you. You shall be beloved of the Father's soul. Is he enriched with all manner of blessings beyond conception? So shall you be, for he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he has chosen us in him. Is Christ exalted? Oh, how loftily is he lifted up to sit upon a glorious high throne for ever! But you shall sit upon his throne with him and share his exaltation as you have shared his humiliation. Oh, the delight of thus being joint heirs with Christ, and with him in the possession of all that he possesses. What is heaven? It is the place which his love suggested, which his genius invented, which his bounty provided, which his royalty has adorned, which his wisdom has prepared, which he himself glorifies; in that heaven you are to be with him for ever. You shall dwell in the King's own palace. Its gates of pearl and streets of gold shall not be too good for you. You who love him are to abide for ever with him, not near him in a secondary place, as a servant lives at the lodge gate of his master's mansion, but with him in the self-same palace in the metropolis of the universe.

In a word, believers are to be identified with Christ for ever. That seems to me to be the very life and essence of the text: with him for ever, that is, identified with him for ever. Do they ask for the Shepherd? They cannot behold him to perfection except as surrounded by his sheep. Will the King be illustrious? How can that be if his subjects are lost? Do they ask for the bridegroom? They cannot imagine him in the fulness of joy without his bride. Will the Head be blessed? It could not be if it were separated from the members. Will Christ be for ever glorified? How can he be if he shall lose his jewels? He is a foundation, and what would he be if all his people were not built upon him into the similitude of a palace? O brethren, there shall be no Christ without Christians; there shall be no Saviour without the saved ones; there shall be no Elder Brother without the younger brethren; there shall be no Redeemer without his redeemed. We are his fulness, and he must have us with him. We are identified with him for ever. Nothing can ever divide us from him. Oh, joy, joy for ever. Hallelujah!

"Since Christ and we are one,
Why should we doubt or fear?
If he in heaven hath fix'd his throne,
He'll fix his members there."

Two or three practical sentences. One word is this—*This "with the Lord" must begin now.* Do you wish to be for ever with the Lord? You must be with him by becoming his disciple in this life. None come to be with the Lord hereafter who are not with the Lord here in time. See to it, dear hearers, see to it, lest this unspeakable privilege should never be yours.

Next, every Christian should seek to be more and more with Christ, for *the growth and glory of your life lies there.* Do you want to have heaven below? Be with Christ below. Do you want to know at once what eternal bliss is? Know it by living now with the Lord.

The next word is, *how plainly then the way of life is to be with the Lord.* If you want to be saved, sinner, you must be "with the Lord." There is no other way for you. Come near to him, and lay hold upon him by faith. Life lies there. Come to him by a humble, tearful faith. Come at once.

And, lastly, *what must it be to be without the Lord?* What must it be to be against the Lord? For it comes to that, "He that is not with me," saith he, "is against me." To be for ever without the Lord, banished from his love, and light, and life, and peace, and rest, and joy! What a loss will this be! What must it be to be for ever against the Lord! Think of it: for ever hating Jesus, for ever plotting against him, for ever gnashing your teeth against him; this is hell, this is the infinite of misery, to be against the Lord of love and life and light. Turn ye from this fatal course. Believe on him: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Thess. iv.

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"NOW THEN DO IT."

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 23RD, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you: now then do it: for the Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies."—2 Samuel iii. 17, 18.

You know the circumstances under which these words were spoken. God had cast off Saul because he had not been faithful, and he had appointed David to be his successor, anointing him by the hand of Samuel. Yet when Saul was slain in battle Israel seemed determined to choose her own king, by selecting one of Saul's family, and under the leadership of Abner the majority of the tribes set up Ishbosheth, son of Jonathan, to be king. Then commenced a civil war between the two parties, and we read that the house of David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. In process of time Abner, the commander-in-chief and prime minister, who was at the head of Saul's party, because it served his own purpose, changed his mind, and resolved that David should become king over the whole land. Having so resolved he began to persuade the tribes and argue with them on David's behalf; and the words of my text are a part of a very powerful argument which he used in order to induce them to give up the king of their own choosing, and offer the crown to the king whom God had appointed, even David. I need say but very little, however, about the circumstances of the case, for I am about to accommodate the words to quite another people and another king. I desire, in all sincerity of heart, to approach those of you whose minds are ruled by evil desires and motives, all of which are alien sovereigns, hostile to the true king, whom God has anointed,—and to remind you this morning that you have in times past sought to have Jesus to be King over you. Perhaps you have some desires towards him lingering in your heart even yet, and therefore I have hope of you that you will go further, and in all sincerity submit yourselves to his dominion. It is time that you should go beyond mere desires, and attain to something practical. In the

No. 1,375.

words of Abner I would say to you, "Now then do it." If worth desiring it is worth performing. "Now then do it." There are the best of reasons why you should do it, for Jesus is God's appointed King, anointed by the Holy Ghost, by whom alone he will save you from your spiritual enemies. May God grant that his word be successful, through his divine Spirit, in establishing the kingdom of Christ in many undecided hearts this morning, and he shall have the praise.

The text gives me the following run of thought. First, I would *re-mind you of former impulses*—"Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you"; secondly, I would *recommend decided action*—"Now then do it"; and thirdly, I would *reason with a forcible argument*, for, only changing names, I may read my text on in this fashion, "The Lord hath spoken of Jesus, saying, by the hand of my only begotten Son I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the powers of darkness, and out of the hand of all their enemies."

I. First, then, my business this morning is to REMIND UNDECIDED PERSONS OF FORMER IMPULSES. I would personally address each hesitating hearer, and call up the memories of his life. You are not a Christian, but many times you have been upon the verge of it, for you have even gone the length of seeking, after a fashion, to have Jesus for your King.

Of course *the character and frequency of those impulses have varied greatly in different individuals*. Each man has had his own amount of drawings and inclinations towards God. I cannot so speak as to describe all at once, and therefore I must go into particulars. Many of you have been tutored in the ways and manners of the godly from your youth up. The very first song you heard your mother sing as she hushed you to sleep was sweetened with the name of Jesus. Probably you cannot recollect a time when there were not some holy agencies at work upon your heart; and you recollect the effect they had upon you, even at the very beginning, when even as a child your little prayer at night grew fervent, and you sobbed yourself to sleep with grief for having done wrong. Often did your childish heart sigh after "gentle Jesus" and long for his love. I think I see those tears upon your little cheek even now, when you had lately heard the story of Jesus, or had been earnestly addressed concerning death and judgment to come. When the sweetness and beauty of Christ and the happiness of believers were set before you in your youth you often felt drawn to the cross. Nor was it in childhood alone, for as you grew older there were agencies adapted for your growth prepared by infinite love. Some of you fell into the hands of sincere Christian men and women, who did not cease to instruct you and to warn you; and sometimes, as you must remember if you will but try to do so, you were, like Agrippa of old, "almost persuaded to be a Christian." You promised, you resolved, you began even to pray, but, alas! your goodness was as the morning cloud, as the early dew, and soon passed away; but yet you do remember, do you not, that it was there? Since then, though you have been immersed in business cares, you have not been altogether without some thoughts towards Jesus the Saviour. An earnest sermon has driven you home to your knees; affliction has frequently compelled you solemnly to consider; the death of others has made you pause, and forced you to hopeful resolves. Can you count up the many

times in which you have come to a dead halt, and have raised the question, "Shall I go further or shall I turn?" Your soul has been half constrained to say within herself, "Things shall be altered : I will be no longer an ungrateful child to my good God, but I will arise and go unto my Father." Why, there are some of you to whom continuance in rebellion must have been very difficult, for you have had to stifle and almost to strangle conscience. If you do not see, it is because you have laid your fingers heavily upon your eyelids to keep out the light : if you have not heard, it has been because you have stopped your ears till they have become dull of hearing. The knock at your door by your Lord's pierced hand has been kept up year after year, almost incessantly, and even in the night watches you have been startled with it. He whose head is wet with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night, has stood there these many weary months knocking, knocking, knocking ! In boundless patience of love he lingers still, and again lifts that scarred hand to knock again in tender earnestness. You have been almost persuaded to rise from the couch of your sloth to admit him to your heart, but as yet you have not done so. Ye sought for David to be king over you in times past, some of you, but, alas ! ye have not crowned him yet.

There are others among you who have not been so highly favoured with religious advantages. Some of you, perhaps, come of an ungodly household, and your bringing up has been apart from the things of God. I grieve to say that this is getting daily more frequent, especially in our great cities. Children nowadays are not trained to the observance of the Sabbath as they were, and multitudes in this great city seldom tread the floor of God's house at all. Still I can scarcely imagine that there is one present but what has at times enjoyed holy impulses, right convictions, and pure desires. Conscience, though not enlightened as we could have wished, has not been quite quiet with you : you have felt uneasy in your unconverted state, and you are uneasy now. You have been forced sometimes to think, and when a man who is without God and without Christ begins to think his thoughts must trouble him, and, being troubled, he is likely to desire the way of peace. I cannot but believe that you who are thoughtful have sometimes had intense desires to be Christians ; you have longed to be pardoned, renewed, and sanctified. Would you not give all that you have for a sure hope of heaven ? You know that occasionally at least pure aspirations have come over you, and I wish that I could by any means so revive your recollections that you would all confess that ye sought for Jesus in times past to be King over you. If you do remember these things, I beg you also to consider that your responsibilities have been increased in proportion to those impulses, for every time you have checked conscience, or have held yourself back when you were moved towards right, you have not only incurred a present sin, but you have rendered all your future life the more censurable. The more difficult it is to persevere in an evil course, the more intensely sinful that perseverance becomes. So that I must charge upon some here present that every day in which they live without repentance and without faith is a day of aggravated iniquity, seeing that they resist the Holy Ghost as did also their fathers, and they love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. None are so blameable for ignorance as those who refuse to learn, and none so guilty

in their sins as those who resist better impulses, and do violence to themselves in order to indulge their iniquities. The case varies, however, as we have already seen.

These impulses have been usual in you at certain times, and these find a parallel in the case of Israel. The tribes desired David for king on certain occasions. For instance, whenever Saul was more than ordinarily oppressive, they sighed for the son of Jesse, who was of a gentler mould. Whenever sin begins to be oppressive to a man, he has for the present some wish to escape from its tyranny. Sin is a very hard taskmaster, especially some forms of it. Let a man pursue the sin of drunkenness, and "who hath woe? who hath redness of eyes" like to him? Let a man follow the lusts of the flesh, and his very body soon begins to smart beneath the lash of his despotic vices. Even now the earnest of sin's wage is something dreadful for a man to receive. Have ye never seen a spend-thrift brought to beggary and rags? Do you wonder that when his hungry belly accuses him he promises better things, and in a measure is sincere in his good resolves? Selfishness itself calls upon men to quit their evil ways which are ruining them body and soul, and it is not at all wonderful that so loud and near a voice should for a time be heard. Some of you know well when it has been so, when your sin has lost its pleasurable, when the beaded bubbles of frothy joy have disappeared from the cup of sin, and it has become stale and flat, then you have seen the hollowness of the world and cried, "I would fain be a Christian."

These Israelites, perhaps, in their hearts sought for David to be king when they saw the joy upon the face of David's men. His troopers often had spoil to share, and they always spake well of their captain, and whenever a David's man was seen anywhere about Judah or Israel, the people said, "Those warriors have a goodly heritage in being under such a noble leader," and they wished they had such a king themselves. I do not doubt but sometimes when you hear Christ preached in all his sweetness, your mouths begin to water after him. "Is he so good, is he so pleasant? Oh, that we knew him!" And when you see Christians so happy, and especially when you see them in times of trouble so cheerful and joyous under all their trials, I know you have had an inward wish that you knew their secret and could share their peace. Has not it been so? When you saw your mother die did you not wish you had her Saviour to soften your pillow as he softened hers. When that dear little child of yours who loved the Saviour sang of Jesus as she departed, you almost wished that you could die with her if you might as cheerfully meet the Lord. Well, those were times when you sought David to be king over you in days past. I want, if I can, to bring them all up afresh. Perhaps if they would all revive at once, and come over again, God might bless them and make the united impulse strong enough, by his good Spirit, to carry you over the frontier into the kingdom of Christ.

The Israelites, no doubt, often wished that David had been king when they saw their enemies gradually encroaching upon their territory and threatening to subdue them. They sighed and said, "Oh, for an hour of David with his sling and his stone. In the name of the Lord he brought down the haughty Philistine. O that he were to the front again! Saul has fallen on the mountains, and Jonathan is slain upon his high places, and we, the people of the Lord, are trodden down by the uncircumcised."

Oh for the son of Jesse once again to lead our armies forth to successful war !” Have not you also, when you have seen the strength of your growing sins and contemplated the ruin which they will bring upon you, longed for a deliverer ? When you have perceived what sin will surely bring upon you by-and-by, in another world, and how even now it holds you in bondage, have you not wished for a Saviour, ay, wished for the Christ of God to come and smite your sins and overthrow Satan and set you free ? I am sure you must have had such wishes when sickness has made death appear to be approaching, when judgment has begun to be realized, and the terrors of wrath to come. Ye thought of Jesus in times past to be King over you.

And have you not also, like Israel, often longed for your true King that you might at length find rest ? The civil war must have inflicted much misery upon the nation, and therefore the people wished the strife to be ended, through David’s being made king. So, too, you wish that your heart were peaceful and quiet, for now you are ill at ease. You love your pleasurable sins, but you are not easy in them ; the bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself upon it, and you know this ! You wish that you enjoyed the solid peace, the confidence, and satisfaction which believers possess ; but you know that you cannot have it apart from Christ, and this reflection has sometimes made you seek to Christ, after your fashion, though, alas, it has not lasted long enough to produce real allegiance to him. I think it right to remind you of these past feelings. How I wish they would come back and rise to practical results. May the Holy Ghost renew them in a deeper form than in the past, that you may at once with eagerness go forth and salute your King—the King who wore a crown of thorns for your sake.

These seekings after David were sometimes with the Israelites vivid and strong ; and so, too, *impulses with undecided people are occasionally very powerful*. Though they do not actually lay hold on eternal life, they yet have strong desires to do so. They go beyond empty wishes, and seriously sigh for an interest in Jesus, and yet they pause there and go no further. The bud becomes a tiny fruit, and then withers from the tree. I have known unconverted people to feel great terror at the thought of remaining unsaved, and under this influence they have gone to their knees and begun to pray, they have gone to their Bibles and begun to read, they have attended the house of God with great regularity, and listened with very solemn attention, and they have even gone the length of mending their ways in many points. They have begun to frequent prayer-meetings, and for awhile it did seem as if Jesus would be king over them ; indeed, we hoped that they were already the servants of the Lord, but, alas, our hopes were disappointed, they turned back, and walked no more with us. Oftentimes the impulses which are put aside and stamped out by half-awakened men are exceedingly difficult to overcome. Some of you have had to exert yourselves fearfully to remain as you are ; you have needed help of the world, the flesh, and the devil to overpower the force which held you for awhile in its grasp. Some men battle for damnation with a greater force than others strive after eternal life. The way of transgressors is sometimes hard, in this sense, that they find it difficult to continue as they are ; they are so persecuted by the persuasions, warnings, and entreaties of good men, and

their conscience is so alarmed as to give them little or no rest. Alas, their neck is as an iron sinew, and they are set on mischief, and despite the inward calls which bid them seek Jesus for their King they turn a deaf ear to the tenderest wooings, and continue as they were; but not without an awful increase of guilt.

Listen to me, ye who are described in the language I have used; listen and learn wisdom. *Nothing has come of all the seekings of your youth and your after days.* Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you, but nothing has come of it! Nothing has come of it even to this day. You saw that religion was right, you did not argue to the contrary, you admitted all its reasons, you so far yielded your understanding that you would even defend the truth against opponents; but what of all that? To admit a thing to be right is but a small part of the matter, if you practically deny it by your indifference. You have wished that you were a Christian; you have wished it hundreds of times, but this also is vanity, if carried no further. "If wishes were horses beggars would ride," and so, if wishes were graces the careless would be saved. You know, too, that you went beyond wishing: you regretted that you were not already decided, you felt very much ashamed of yourself for having resisted so long. If anybody had told you that you would be hesitating now, you would not have believed it. Ten years ago, if any one had said, "In ten years' time you will be sitting in the Tabernacle just as undecided as you used to be," you would have replied with indignation, "Is thy servant a dog? I shall never be so foolish." But it is even worse, for now you do not feel half so much as you once did. You were more impressive years ago than you are now, and, speaking after the manner of men, you are now far less likely to be saved. You know it is so, and yet you did at that time, after a fashion, pray, and, after a sort, you were in earnest: but what of all that? Nothing has come of it. Will anything ever come of it? The Israelites might talk about making David king, but that would not crown him. They might meet together and say they wished it were so, but that would not do it. It might be generally admitted that he ought to be monarch, and it might even be earnestly hoped that one day he would be so, but that would not do it: something more decided must be done. And oh, am I not indeed hitting the very centre of the target when I say of some of you that you have scores of times given up the whole question as a matter of argument? Yes, and your heart has submitted that it was wrong of you to continue as you are, and you have been moved with strong resolutions towards repentance and faith, and yet you are the same as ever, and not one inch the forwarder. Still you are in darkness, still under the dominion of Satan, still the slave of sin, and so you will be in ten years' more time, I fear; and so you will be to the end of life, and so for ever and for ever! May God grant that my words may not be prophetic concerning any one of you, but that you may this very day be moved by the Eternal Spirit to take decided action through his grace. "*Now then do it.*"

II. I therefore pass on to the second part, to RECOMMEND DECIDED ACTION. "*Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you, now then do it.*" No longer stand thinking, questioning, hesitating, halting, but now then do it. Do one thing or another; if God be God, serve him; if Baal or the devil be God, serve him. Do not sit down for ever in this

absurd condition of believing a thing to be right and yet neglecting it, of feeling yourself to be in danger and not seeking to escape by the way which you admit to be safe and fitting. Come now to something like honest dealing with yourself and with your Lord.

Note the business on hand—it is that Jesus should be king over you. It was needful that David should become king, or else he could not rescue Israel from the Philistines, and in your case Jesus must be king or he cannot be your Saviour. Thousands of people are quite willing to be saved by Christ, but when it comes to the very first step, namely, that Jesus must be accepted as ruler, lawgiver, master, king, and Lord, then they start back and reject eternal life.

“Yet know (nor of the terms complain),
Where Jesus comes, he comes to reign;
To reign, and with no partial sway;
Thoughts must be slain that disobey.”

The whole question of your being saved or lost will turn on this: if Jesus be not your king, then the devil will remain enthroned in your heart, and you will remain a lost soul: but if your heart will yield itself up to the supreme authority of King Jesus, then the work of salvation has already commenced, and Jesus will take care to purge your nature of all his enemies, until you shall be an empire in which he alone shall reign in holiness and peace. Jesus must be king! What say you, sir, shall it be so? Do you hesitate about it? He must be your Lord and Master, his will must be your will, his commands must be law to you, and his example must henceforth be the model of your life. Do you demur, or will you yield at once?

Next notice that if Christ is to be your king, it must be by your own act and deed. So saith the text concerning king David—“Now then do it.” David would not be king over Israel unless Israel was willing that he should be king; and our Lord Jesus Christ is no forced monarch over one single human heart; the promise is, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” The kingdom of Christ over men’s hearts is a kingdom of love, not a kingdom of force, so that there must be the full assent and consent of the will to the reigning power of Christ in the soul, or else he does not reign at all. What sayest thou, yes or no? Art thou willing that Jesus Christ the Son of God should henceforth rule and reign over thine entire nature as thy heart’s supreme Lord? There is the question. Let it be settled once for all. You have sometimes sought to have it so, “*now then do it.*”

And here is the point, if Jesus is to reign the old king must go down. It is of no use trying to have Ishbosheth and David on the throne at the same time. It is impossible to serve sin and to serve Christ. Favourite and constitutional sins must be relinquished. I know many persons who say that they are under concern of soul whose sincerity I more than question, because they continue in known sin, and yet they complain that they cannot find peace. How can they? If you meet with a person who drinks upon the sly and is frequently half intoxicated, if you hear him say that he cannot find rest in Christ, do you wonder? Do you not feel that he is a hypocrite? How can men and women continually fuddle themselves with drink and yet hope to be children of God? Give up your abominable tippling. Do you think Christ is going to save sots

impulses which urge it towards the right, and yet remaining a captive to that accursed freewill which enslaves it to the last degree. Alas, how many put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, and therefore will not come unto Christ that they might have life. Such is the state of man : such is the state of some of you. May God have mercy upon you for Christ's sake! It is mine, however, to return distinctly to the charge of my text and say, "*Now then do it.*" Oh, sirs, I wish you would do as one did a little while ago. I was preaching, and I said that if any man sincerely went to God confessing his sin and just trusted Christ to save him, if he did not save him I wished he would write me a note to let me know it, for I had been so accustomed to declare that he would not cast out any that came to him that I should like to know if I was labouring under an error. There was one in my audience who went deliberately home, and kneeling at his bedside, he said, with all his heart, "I do confess my guiltiness before thee, O God, and I do now trust myself with Christ that he may save me. Lord, cast me not away, for I believe in thy Son." He found peace immediately, and continued to feel the love of God shed abroad in his soul; and he therefore thought it right to tell me the good news. It greatly cheered me. Instead of being rejected he was welcomed by the God of mercy, and found immediate acceptance in Christ Jesus. I remember to have said that if one believing soul was cast out by Christ and sent to hell, I would engage to lie side by side with him in the quenchless fire for ever and ever. I repeat the pledge. If any of you perish repenting of your sin, and trusting alone in Jesus, I will perish with you. I will be bondsman for God this morning that, if any one of you will humble himself before the Lord and simply trust his Son whom you accept to be your King and your Saviour, he can no more reject you than he can cease to be, for so it is written, "*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*" "*Now then do it.*" There is life in a look at the Crucified One: the Lord help you to look to the Crucified One at once! "*Now then do it.*" Dream not of believing to-morrow or next year, nor even in half-an-hour's time; but cast your guilty soul on Christ at once. NOW THEN DO IT. While now the Spirit of God pervades this assembly yield yourself to the silver sceptre which is held in the pierced hand of the once crucified King and you shall live. *Now then do it.*

III.—Lastly, I have to REASON WITH STRONG ARGUMENTS. I will utter them rapidly, for time fails me. Here they are in a condensed form. You, dear friend, need salvation. Sin has got the mastery over your nature, and you need a powerful arm to set you free from it. Nor is it sin alone, but punishment also which threatens you. Be you who you may, you are in danger of eternal wrath and you need to be saved from it. Now, it is evident that none can save you from eternal wrath but King Jesus. Will you have him for King? Whether you will have *him* or not, you must have a king. Every man in the world has a master of some kind; some principle or another has dominion over him, and the worst tyrant a man can serve is himself. Self is the hardest and meanest of all despots. Seeing then that you must have a king, can you have a better king than King Jesus, who is incarnate love? Think of his character and of the love he has shown to men, and tell me could you have a better King?

The sooner it is done the better. Until the deed is done, remember you are undone: till Christ is accepted by you as king, till sin is hated and Jesus is trusted, you are under another king. Whatever you may think of it, the devil is your master. You say you do not like him, but he is your master and lord for all that, since he leads you captive at his will. Till Jesus reigns in your heart you are also in the utmost danger,—in danger of death and eternal punishment. Let your breath go the wrong way, or let your heart cease beating just for a little, and *you will be in hell*. My friends, *you* will be in hell. You who sought for Jesus in times past, you who felt those good desires, *you*, the beloved child of Christian parents, you the earnest hearer at the house of God, you who are fond of sermons, but are, I fear, sermon-hardened; *you*, even you, will sink down to hell, with all those privileges like millstones about your neck. "Well, sir, I will think of it." Under cover of that promise there lurks delay, and that is exactly what I am afraid of. Do not so much think as act. "Now then do it." I beseech you to make serious and immediate business of it. Perhaps if it is not done at this moment it never will be done. For all these long years nothing has been actually done, though so much has been proposed, and this mainly because of your perpetual delays. What has come of all your fine resolutions? What is the good of a mere resolve? A man resolves that he will be industrious, but if he continues to lie on the bed of the sluggard is he any the more thrifty? A man is sick and resolves to take medicine, but leaves it untasted—is he benefited by his intention? A man resolves to go on a journey, but does not take the trouble to get into the public conveyance, or to use his limbs—what progress does he make? Does he not abide just where he was? All this bears upon your case; you know it does.

All this while Jesus is being rejected. We do not sufficiently think of the dishonour done to Jesus by base delays. All the while that Israel did not accept David as king, David was being badly treated. He who fought the Philistines for them, he whose valour was Israel's right arm, whose band of men was the sword and shield of the nation against the Philistines, was being kept away from his rightful throne; his merits forgotten, his claims ignored. Soul, by refusing him his throne you are treating Jesus ill. You halts between two opinions are setting him in rivalry with foul sin and a base world, and upon you daily guilt is coming, a guilt which grows thicker and blacker as time rolls on. Think of your previous impulses, and as you consider them answer me this question—were they wrong ones? When in your childhood you felt such strong desires after Christ, were they not commendable desires? Why, then, do you not carry them out? If you were wrong in checking them, then why should you continue to act so unwisely? If they are returning now, why not entertain them heartily? Remember, moreover, that though you had these holy impulses they passed away: have you any reason to hope that they will continue with you now? Will they not again melt into thin air? Unless God, the almighty Spirit, at this time shall lead you to take decided steps you will resolve again to-day, and re-resolve, but continue still the same. Of all things the most pitiable sight to my mind is a man who has light enough to know he is wrong but not grace enough to forsake the evil. It is terrible to see a soul under

soul, and body, to be thine for ever and ever. We are henceforth not our own, for thou hast bought us with a price." All this has long ago been done by many of us, we are only repeating the declaration which we have made hundreds of time before. Oh that some of you poor souls would hear the voice which says—"Now then do it." To give you words wherewith to do it we will all sing the verse—

"'Tis done, the great transaction's done ;
I am my Lord's, and he is mine,
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine."

May the Lord bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm i., ii. : 2 Sam.
iii. 17—21.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."—1 Peter ii. 4, 5.

At the outset I call your special attention to the connection of the two verses. "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, ye also, as living stones, are built up": or, "To whom coming, . . . ye become an holy priesthood." Everywhere throughout Scripture the connection between the saints and their Head is perpetually mentioned. "*In Christ*" is the very symbol of New Testament writers. Whatsoever things are mentioned choice and good concerning the saints, their privileges and honours, we are always reminded that they are only enjoyed in connection with the Lord Jesus, according as the Father hath blessed us in him and made us to be accepted in the Beloved. Coming unto him as a foundation we become a temple; coming to him as the Holy One of Israel we become a holy priesthood, and resting in his sacrifice we also offer spiritual sacrifices. Coming close to him—for such is the force of the word—coming closer and closer, we grow up in all things into him, and become perfect in Christ Jesus. Realising and consciously enjoying our vital union with him we obtain promises, receive blessings, possess privileges, and exercise offices which can only be ours in union with our Lord. It is only by coming to our great covenant foundation, and only in proportion as we daily come to him and rest upon him that God dwells in us as in a temple. It is only as we are seen in union with the apostle and high priest of our profession, that the Father allows us to serve him as priests, and accepts the sacrifices which we present.

Let this truth be always in your view, because there are many who judge us otherwise. The true judgment of any man is how he standeth towards Christ, whether he be in him and believeth in him or not. If he believeth on the Lord Jesus he is in him, and he is by coming to him built up as a part of the spiritual house; but if he be not in Christ he

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may call himself by what name he pleases, and may assume this or that lofty pretension, but he boasteth himself beyond his line and beyond the truth. Union to Christ is *the* text of union with the true church. If we are members of the most orthodox church in Christendom it will avail us nothing unless we are spiritually joined unto Christ himself. Without Christ we can do nothing, and we are nothing. There are some who judge us because we follow not with them. They cry, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." They claim to be "the church" beyond whose pale there can be no salvation. Brethren, regard them not, for if ye be in Christ ye are built up as a spiritual house, and so are a portion of the true church. If ye have come to Jesus by a living faith, and if it be your daily practice to come to your Lord and live upon him and unto him, you are priests unto God and need not mind the censure of those who are ordained of men.

There are others who condemn us because we reject the pomp of their ceremonial, the prestige of their state connection, and the venerableness of their antiquity. These have weight with the unlearned and unspiritual, but those who are taught of God discern the vanity of their boastings. Be not moved by their judgment, no, not for an hour, for if you indeed come to the Lord Jesus you are built up by himself into a spiritual house, and that which he doeth does not lack for honour or reverence. It is enough of prestige, and of antiquity, for us to be accepted by our Lord Jesus. "Unto you that believe he is honour." Whether your critics are so or not, you are beyond question living stones built up, a spiritual house, if, indeed, you are evermore coming to your Lord.

Some there be who in the serenity of their infallibility, because we cannot endorse their creed or pronounce their shibboleth, straightway cut us off and count us to be mere pretenders. But if we are in our very heart coming unto Christ, if he be the end of our conversation, if we make him Alpha and Omega, and if he is to us the beginning and the end of all things, we may make small account of the condemnation or the approval of the best of our brethren, since we are in Christ, and so we are a spiritual house built up for the inhabiting of God. I remember an anecdote of the Jesuit Fathers of the South Seas which illustrates this. When they intruded themselves upon a native population who had been converted to Christ they began to instruct them in their Popish idolatries by means of pictures, and among the rest showed them a famous tree. The natives asked, "What is this?" "It sets forth the church." "And what is this root?" "O that is Jesus Christ." "And this trunk, what is that?" "That is the succession of the Popes, who are the vicars of Christ." "And these great boughs, what are these?" "They are the cardinals." "And these branches, what are they?" "They are the bishops of the church." "And what are these small branches and little twigs?" "They are the priests and the faithful." "And what are these poor twigs which are cut off and are falling into the fire?" "They are the heretics,—such as Martin Luther, Calvin, and the like." The natives looked at the picture for awhile, rubbed their eyes, declared that they did not understand much about it, but with great glee exclaimed—"It is all right with us, for we have the root. We have the root." So we can say if we have come to Jesus Christ our

Lord, we are growing out of the root, and we need have no doubt as to our being in the right place. The branch which grows out of him must be a true branch of the vine: the stone which rests upon him as a foundation must be a true part of the spiritual temple. Our only hope lies in our being *of* him and *in* him: we know no other. Whatever the dignity which men ascribe unto themselves apart from him, verily I say unto you we know them not, neither do we give place for subjection unto them. They may tell us of what *they* are, but we only know what *Jesus* is. It is written, "The sheep hear *his* voice, and a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." We know not the many strange voices which are in the world, of those who would have us follow them, and yield to their authority; but we know the voice of the great King in Zion, and we rejoice to feel that if we are found in him we are accepted in him, and in him to-day, as living stones, we are built up a spiritual house.

I purpose, this morning, to show that we who are in Christ have the reality of all that which Ritualism pretends to possess: the votaries of that faith delight in the shadow, but we have the substance. For, first, we are a *temple*,—"built up a spiritual house"; secondly, we are a *priesthood*,—"a holy priesthood"; and thirdly, we have our own peculiar *sacrifices*,—"to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

I. First then, all those who are coming to Christ, daily coming nearer and nearer to him, are, as living stones built up into a TEMPLE. The saints in their corporate capacity are a holy temple unto the Lord. They are called a spiritual house in *opposition to the old material house* in which the emblem of the divine presence shone forth in the midst of Israel, that temple in which the Jew delighted, counting it to be beautiful for situation and the joy of the whole earth. We have nothing to do with material temples now; we are quite clear of that, for the typical has given way to the real and spiritual. Solomon's temple itself, is ever to be spoken of with honour, seeing that God did for a time make it the centre of his worship, yet it must not be too highly honoured, for God never had any very great delight in its magnificence, and wrought but few mighty deeds amid its splendours. You remember that when David proposed to build it the Lord seemed rather to yield to the weakness of his servant than to rejoice in the proposal, for he said, "For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day; but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another. Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars?" The Lord sought not for such a palace, nor when it was built did he much regard it, for he says by his servant Isaiah, "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Stephen in the latter day, when he was rehearsing the history of Israel, alludes to the temple, but he carefully guards himself from being supposed to attach any great importance to it. He says, "But Solomon

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built him a house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands;" and goes on to quote the passage from the prophet, which I have just mentioned. When the apostles sat down opposite the temple which Herod had renovated, and were filled with wonder at the great stones whereof it was made, our Lord did not seem at all to sympathise in their admiration of its glories, but he said, "There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." Had God cared for the temple he could have preserved it to this day, but lo, like a dream of night it has passed away; and no order has since been given to the servants of the Lord to build temples. We have nobler work to do in building up the spiritual house, and need not be occupied with gorgeous architecture of buildings made with hands. I fear me that the pretentious architecture which is now so much in vogue for professedly Christian places of worship is only one of those ill signs of the times which indicate a departure from inward and spiritual worship. The prophet Hosea said of old, "Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples." There is, I fear, everywhere too much going back to the beggarly elements of outward and materialistic worship and a receding from pure spiritual adoration: even the purer sort are hankering after visible show, and the delights of music and the fine arts as accessories to worship. God, the Everlasting One, hath beneath yon blue canopy, studded with a thousand stars, a far more glorious temple than all that architect shall plan, or wealth of builders and skill of masons shall ever be able to rear. All man's architecture is but child's play compared with the great universe of God, which is the temple of the infinite; and what seems to us the most enchanting music must surely be but discord in his ears. It is significant that of heaven, where God is best worshipped, John says, "I saw no temple therein." Where every place is holy what needs a temple? And where every being shall be perfect and for ever full of adoring love, there shall be no need of any select shrine or settled hour of assembly. When we become holy, as we should be, we shall count all places and all hours to be the Lord's, and we shall always dwell in his temple because God is everywhere. For one spot to be holy and not another is but to show how much of the earth we resign to the devil: from this dreary superstition I pray you shake yourselves loose. We have not so learned Christ as to count one edifice more sacred than another, for we know him as cleansing all places and things and henceforth nothing to us is common or unclean; save only as sin defileth and spreadeth pollution. We are, then, a spiritual temple in opposition to all material temples, even that of Solomon, included amongst the rest.

We are a spiritual temple, *but not the less real*. That which is spiritual is sometimes supposed to be mythical and imaginary, but indeed it is not so. The things which are seen are the shadowy and the dreamy; the things which are not seen are the substantial and the eternal. Our Lord Jesus called his body the temple of God: he said, "Destroy this temple, and I will build it in three days." As a temple of God, the body of Christ was most real. There was no fiction about his humanity. The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us, so that the apostle John saith, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." His perfect body was a true

temple which God had pitched and not men, and just as true and real is the spiritual temple of which the text speaketh. With equal truth the apostle Paul tells us that our bodies are "the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in us": and that not by imagination but in reality, as the context of that expression proves, since he therefore bids us avoid all fornication. (1 Cor. vi. 18, 19). He would not use a mere fancy as a practical reason for guarding the purity of our bodies. The force of the argument must lie in its truthfulness, and so the bodies of the saints are really and indeed temples of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, the whole church together, the whole body of the elect, the whole company of the redeemed, regenerate, and called, are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," and this also is most real. Read the two verses in the first of Corinthians and the third chapter. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Surely this cannot relate to a fiction or a dream, or the punishment for defiling a mere notion would hardly be so terrible.

Yet while real the temple of God in the saints is spiritual: a church is made up of spiritual men, and her temple form is spiritual. Your eye cannot as yet see the church in which God dwells. Words have come to be so misused nowadays that they call a steeple and a building made of stone or brick and mortar a church, which cannot possibly be correct; for a church is a company of faithful men. Alas, they have yet further perverted language, and they make a company of ecclesiastics, whether regenerated or not, to be "the church." "Going into the church" is a current phrase which shows the ignorance of those who use it. Nor is this all, there is no one visible church which can claim to be *the* church. I tell you the Church of Jesus Christ differs greatly from these associations which are called churches. The visible church contains a large part of the true church of Christ, but it is not identical with it. Like its Lord, the church is as yet hidden, and the creation itself waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. The Lord has a people scattered abroad everywhere, whose lives are hid with him in God, and these make up the real temple of God in which the Lord dwelleth. Men of every name and clime and age are quickened into life, made living stones, and then laid upon Christ,—and these constitute the true temple, which God hath built and not man, for he dwelleth not in temples made with hands; that is to say, of man's building, but he dwelleth in a temple which he himself hath builded for his habitation for ever, saying—"This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it."

This temple is spiritual, and therefore *it is living*. A material temple is dead, a spiritual temple must be alive; and so the text tells us, "Ye also as living stones." I cannot understand why the translators put the word "lively," since it is precisely the same word in the original as above, where they have translated it "a living stone." Those good men wished to infuse a little variety into their version, but this was hardly justifiable in interpreters, who ought to have given us the exact meaning, and have left the sacred style to take care of itself: even its monotony is more refreshing than the variety of any other book. True believers are

stones full of life, so joined to Christ as to be part of the live rock, instinct with spiritual vitality. God hath quickened them from the dead: the Holy Spirit has come to take possession of them, and whereas once they were dead in trespasses and sins they now live by the living seed which God has put into them, and the life that they live in the flesh is the life of Christ within them. "I live, yet not I," said the apostle, "but Christ liveth in me." Can your eye of faith see that temple of God made up of living men and women, not alive through the life of the First Adam, but alive through that Second Adam, of whom it is said, "The Second Adam is made a quickening Spirit." Put those live people together in an organisation which allows free action to the life within, and you have before you the divine cathedral in which Jehovah dwells for ever and ever.

We are a spiritual house, my brethren, and therefore *spiritually built up*. Peter says, "Ye are built up,"—built up by spiritual means. You cannot force men and women under rule and call them a church; nor even if they come together willingly will they be a temple for the Lord unless the divine Spirit shall fitly frame them together. God's temple does not build itself, neither does man build it, but it is the sole work of God. The Spirit of God quarries out of the pit of nature the stones which are as yet dead, separating them from the mass to which they adhered; he gives them life, and then he fashions, squares, polishes them, and they, without sound of axe or hammer, are brought each one to its appointed place, and built up into Christ Jesus. The old heathen fabled of the music of Orpheus that it was so sweet that as he poured forth the mellifluous sounds the rocks began to dance around him, and as he continued still to play they piled themselves up into a temple at his bidding. This is true of our Lord Jesus, the music of whose divine word by the Spirit brings us stones from different parts of the fields in which we lay, and fits us together, stone to his stone, till a holy temple in the Lord arises to his praise. May the Holy Ghost work among us in this manner, and may we all become indwelt by the ever-blessed Spirit. As you and I, who have long been brought into the church, think of how we became built upon the foundation, let us praise the hand which laid us in our place; and as we cling closer and closer to the great corner stone to whom we are always coming, let us bless him that the same love which in the beginning cemented us to the corner stone still holds us in our place so firmly that none shall separate us.

We are a spiritual house, dear friends, and therefore *the more fit for the indwelling of God who is a Spirit*. It is impossible, if you consider for a moment, to conceive of God dwelling within walls. The roof may be of cedar and the walls of polished marble overlaid with fine gold, but can Omnipresence be enclosed by a wall or surmounted by a roof? The infinite, who filleth all things, and who maketh all things, who stretcheth out the heavens like a tent to dwell in, who rideth on the wings of the wind, doth he dwell within walls of man's building? It can only be in some typical sense that he can be said to abide in a temple: but that he should dwell within spiritual beings whom he has created in his own image, should dwell in intellect, and thought, and love, and hope, and all those high and spiritual powers which adorn the minds of his people is most fitting. A spirit dwelling in a spiritual house, a spirit inhabiting

other spirits and making them all to be resplendent with his excellence,—this is a beautiful conception, and by no means impossible to realize. Within the assemblies of the saints God is known, loved, remembered, and consulted. In the church he is heartily worshipped, for all true worship is in the hearts of his people, and all else is mockery. Not at your altars, O ye that pile up your hewn stones; not under your groined arches, O ye who seek to show the skill of the stonemason; but in your hearts, believers, where God's skill and power are seen,—there is God worshipped, whether ye are in cathedrals or by the way side. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain of Gerizim, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father, but the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” Material temples are abolished for a spiritual temple is instituted. It is in the church that God reveals himself. If you would know the Lord's love and power and grace you must get among his people, hear their experiences, learn from them how God dealeth with them, and let them tell you, if ye have grace to understand them, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, for he manifesteth himself to them as he doth not to the world. Hath he not said, “I will dwell in them and walk in them”? And it is out of the church, the spiritual palace of God, that his glory shines forth among men. The promise of the hundred and tenth psalm is, “The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.” If you desire to see God's spiritual power you will discern it best by seeing how it is exerted in and through spiritual men and spiritual women, built up together as a spiritual house. The church of Christ is the camp from which the armies of the Lord go forth to conquer the nations; it is the pavilion in which the Prince of Peace has fixed his head-quarters during this last crusade. If you ask for the centre of the nations, if you would discover the eye and soul of this poor world, if you would fain see the glory and excellence of the sons of men, find out the quickened stones that God hath builded together, and you will see the habitation of the great King.

But I must now bring you back to the point from which I started, that all this is in subordination to Christ, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house.” You live because he lives, you are a building because he is the corner stone, you are honoured because “to you that believe he is honour.” Of him and through him are all things. You are no member of the church unless you are a member of Christ; you are not a living stone unless you live by the life of Christ; you are not built up unless you are built up on him. “What think ye of Christ?” That is the test of your whole state. Is he your Saviour, your all in all? If he be, then by this sign do you know that God hath built you up into his temple; but if not you are cast forth as a rejected stone. God grant us grace to realise as a church that we are a temple of God, and realise it best by coming daily to Christ more and more closely, that we may be vitally one with him.

II. In addition to being a temple, God's people are said to be **A PRIESTHOOD**. Observe that they are spoken of together, and not merely

as individuals: they make up one indivisible priesthood: each one is a priest, but all standing together they are a priesthood, by virtue of their being one with Christ. "For we, being many, are one body in Christ." Never let us cease to walk in unity and love, for we are all one in Christ Jesus, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

We are "a holy priesthood." This stands *in opposition to the nominal and worldly priesthood*. I think I see the world's priests, decorated with divers robes and ornaments: a gallant show, indeed, for fools to stare at. I see them with their garments many, and their colours various, with their shaven heads or unshaven, as the case may be! These be the priests of Baal: mere mimics, servants of a visible shrine, servitors of idols; these be not the priests of the living God, who is a Spirit, and is served by spiritual priests. It is of these outward priests that he saith, "He that offereth an oblation is as if he offered swine's blood, and he that burneth incense as if he blessed an idol." There are no priests now save only those who are in Christ, and this priesthood belongs to all believers alike. When a man comes forward and claims that he is a priest, beyond and above the sense in which all Christians are so, we spit upon his pretensions, we utterly loathe the idea of fellowship with such falsehood, and we regard the poor mortal as going back to the elements of old Judaism, if not turning aside altogether unto antichrist. All men and women who are in Christ, believing in him, become sanctified by his Spirit, and so they become, not some of them but all of them, priests and kings unto God through Christ Jesus. This they are, not in themselves in any way, nor by any derivation of grace from men by apostolical succession and the like, but by the personal and direct union with their great High Priest, in whom alone they become a holy priesthood unto God.

"Blest inhabitants of Zion,
Wash'd in the Redeemer's blood,
Jesus, whom their souls rely on,
Makes them kings and priests to God.
'Tis his love his people raises
Over self to reign as kings;
And as priests, his solemn praises
Each for a thank-offering brings."

This priesthood is most real, although it be not of the outward and visible order; for God's priests become priests after a true and notable fashion. The priests of Aaron's line were priests by birth, and so are we, born again with a high and spiritual birth which brings the priesthood with it. In that day when we were begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we assumed our spiritual priesthood. We are priests by anointing too, for if the Spirit of God dwell not in us, neither are we priests of God, by whatsoever names we may aspire to be called: but where the Spirit of God with his divine anointing has descended, that man, that woman has become a priest unto the living God, for in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, but of whatever sex we be, we are alike qualified to exercise this priesthood. If we have been anointed of the Holy Ghost our orders are received from heaven, and none can make them void. And we have also been consecrated. Brethren, I shall leave it to yourselves as to the reality of that consecration, but some of us can solemnly declare that if anything was ever

true in our lives it was the giving up of ourselves unto God. The priest of old was touched with the blood upon his ear, and is not your ear the Lord's to hear his word? The blood was also smeared upon his thumb, and is not your hand the Lord's, with all its dexterity and force consecrated to him? He was also bloodmarked upon his great toe, to show that his foot belonged to the Lord; and is it not so with you? Do you not feel that you would run on his commandments, that you would work in his service, and that you would listen to the voice of his word? You own that you are his: you confess that you are not your own but bought with a price, and therefore you present yourselves to him to be for ever his, in spirit, soul, and body. This consecration is a part of the actual process by which you are in very deed constituted priests unto God.

We are priests, beloved friends, *in the aspect of priesthood towards God*. Priesthood meant in Israel that these men were set apart to speak with God on behalf of the rest of the congregation. They had to offer the daily sacrifice, and kindle the fire of the incense. Now, you who believe in Christ are all priests—priests for mankind, to speak for them to God. As man is spokesman for a dumb world, so are you intercessor for a sinful race. Whereas fields and hills and rocks and cattle cannot speak, nor even the surging waves of the sea, man is the world's eye and heart and tongue, to speak for them all; but, alas, men themselves have become as dumb as driven cattle towards God, and as dead as the earth they tread upon, and you, quickened into life, are to be the priesthood of the universe, the ordained intercessors for the sons of men. You are to speak with God on man's behalf, and bring down, each of you, according to the measure of your faith, the blessing upon the sons of men among whom you dwell. You stand before God to speak for your fellow-men; take care that you do this with solemn earnestness.

And *you are priests towards men also*, for the priest was selected from among men to exercise necessary offices for man's good. The priests' lips should keep knowledge, and if ye be as ye should be, ye hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints. The priests taught God's word, and so also must ye publish among the people the divine message of grace. As lights ye must shine in the world, holding forth the word of life. It is yours to be the nation's teachers: God has consecrated you to the office; do not neglect it, lest the blood of men's souls should lie at your door.

The priest, in addition to being the instructor of the people, was also their intercessor. So must you be. Oh, cease not day nor night to pray for men till God shall send forth his light into the darkest parts of the earth. Ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silence till the time to favour Zion come.

The priests also were to arouse the people, and therefore they had the keeping of the silver trumpets. It was theirs to blow them on the new moon, and to proclaim the Sabbath and the jubilee: it was theirs to give the alarm of war; it was theirs in the Wilderness to summon the tribes together, to bid them march or bid them halt according as the Lord commanded. O, believing men and women, you are to arouse the world. God has quickened you, not for your own sakes alone, for no man liveth unto himself in this priesthood, but that you may have com-

passion on the ignorant and those that are out of the way, and may seek to awaken the careless and lead them to God.

The priests were to bless the people. It was their prerogative to pronounce God's name upon them. Oh, live a blessed life, and as your Master, as he rose to heaven, went there with outstretched hands blessing still his people, let your course on earth be like that of the Ascended One, a life scattering blessings among the sons of men, and let its closing scene be full of love to those you leave below. Thus shall ye be practically the holy priesthood which God would have you to be.

This is to be your function and ministry *always, and in every place*. You are a holy priesthood; not alone on the Lord's day when ye come into this house, but at all times. What is this house more than any other? You are a priesthood everywhere at all times, owing nothing to the place you stand in or to the garb you wear. How this invests the Christian's life with dignity. You are to eat, and drink, and sleep, and wake, and all along to abide in your priesthood. For you the chamber, and the parlour, and the workshop, and the open field, and the street are to be still a place for the exercise of your priestly functions. Do you not see that it must be so, for you carry your temple with you? You yourselves make the temple, for ye are the temple of God. You are always in your temple, for your body is your temple. You are always in your temple, for you are built up into it, and stones do not move when once built up, so that wherever you dwell you are in the place of service and worship. Do you live up to this, my brethren? Do you seek to do so? Do you make your ordinary meals into sacraments? Do you turn the common garments or your toil into vestments? Do you make your speech to be an offering of the sacrifice of thanksgiving? Do you cause your thoughts to be as a sweet perfume of incense unto the Most High? This is whereunto ye are called—to be a holy priesthood. Unholiness in you is a slight upon the office with which God has invested you: unholiness in you is as though the High Priest put off his garments of beauty and glory, and robed himself in the motley of a fool.

Now, brethren, I call you back again to the point from which we started. You are a holy priesthood only as you are in Christ. Christ is the elect of God, and you are elect in him: he is a King, and therefore you are a royal priesthood in him: he is a holy Prince, and you become a holy nation in him: he is God's peculiar treasure, and you become a peculiar people in him; but all this is in oneness with him. If you can be severed from Christ you have lost your priesthood. Only as we abide in our Lord do we abide in our condition of honour and privilege.

III. We must now consider the SACRIFICES which we offer—"spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

We offer spiritual sacrifices *as opposed to the literal*. There were sacrifices of bulls and goats under the law, as you know right well, yet the Lord never cared much for them, for the Holy Spirit when he spake by men of old frequently set these things in the place of small esteem. In an evangelical frame of mind, deeply penitent for sin, the patriarch David was able to see the inefficiency of the legal offerings, and he wrote thus, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering." And again he says concerning thanksgiving, "This also shall please the Lord

better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs." To the same effect and even more comprehensive, is that expression in the fortieth Psalm, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required." And what follows, "Then said I, lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Upon which remarkably clear passage Paul remarks, "he taketh away the first," the sacrifices, "that he may establish the second," or set up the doing of the divine will by Christ as the great sacrifice for ever. Heb. 10. 9

You and I bring no lambs or bulls, but we present a real sacrifice which is far more pleasing in his sight, for it is written, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The text which I have just quoted shows what our sacrifices are, for we imitate our Lord, and say, "I delight to do thy will, O God." This is the true sacrifice. Had not the Lord aforetime spoken by Samuel and said, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." So this day, beloved, when you do the will of God from your heart, when you studiously strive to find out what God's will is, and then conscientiously endeavour to attend to it, you are as priests offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. This sacrificing takes various forms. "I beseech you, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." You are to present yourselves, spirit, soul and body as a sacrifice unto God. You are also to "do good and to communicate, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." To him also you are to "offer the sacrifice of praise continually, the fruit of your lips giving glory to God." To the Lord also you must present the incense of holy prayer; but all these are comprehended, I think, in the expression, "I delight to do thy will, O God." That scribe spake discreetly who replied to our Lord, to love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Oh, ye saints, live to do Jehovah's will. Lay self aside; put self-seeking far away; live wholly to make Jesus great, to make his gospel known, and to perform the will of God which is your sanctification. Live unto God and so offer unceasing sacrifice.

We come back to where we began. The text says, "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," and so reminds us of our dependance upon our Lord Jesus. You have no sacrifice to bring, apart from his sacrifice, and it is only as you live in the spirit of the self-sacrificing Jesus that you can possibly offer unto God such sacrifice as he will accept.

I have done when I have said this much to you. Beloved believers, you see your honourable office: rejoice therein. Are you poor? Are you obscure? Have you to work hard for a living? Nevertheless behave not yourselves before the sons of men as though you were of mean degree, for you are priests unto God. I delight to think of God's priests working in our fields and toiling in our shops, as well as gathered here at this time in a holy convocation; God's priests as much in one place as in another. Such holy priests are all around you. You know them not by their wearing a biretta, or by that hideous long coat and

Roman dog collar in which the world's priests drape themselves, but you know the priests of God by their practical holiness. If you are holy unto God you have your priestly garments on, and if the world disallows you, as it disallowed its Lord, and rejects you as a stone not to be built into the temple, it does not matter,—“The Lord knoweth them that are his.” He has builded you into your place in his spiritual temple, and he will dwell with you, yea, does dwell with you, and will abide with you for ever.

See now your responsibility, and walk circumspectly, because whatever you do will be a part of the acts of “the holy priesthood.” The priests of God must be pure. “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.” The temple of the Lord must not have buyers and sellers, and thieves and robbers to defile it; Christ would have it purged. This puts you into such a responsible position, that I would earnestly implore you, “Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Set apart to such an office as this, everything about you should be marked with “Holiness unto the Lord.”

And now see once more what grace has been bestowed upon you, that *you* should become priests, who in times past were enemies to God. You were not a people, but are now the people of God; who had not obtained mercy, but have now obtained mercy. Ye were sometimes in darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: ye were once the servants of Satan, but now are ye priests unto God. Go, and so live, that men shall say of you, “They are the priests of the Lord.” May you shew forth the virtues of your God and declare his praises. You have received the office; honour it, live up to it, ask for grace to fulfil it. Think how it dignifies you, for the text which I quoted just now says, “Unto you that believe he is honour”—that is the Greek word. It is your honour to have Christ for your Saviour; your honour to be Christ's servants; your honour to be like Christ; your honour to be priests through his grace, and by and by it will be your honour to be with him world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Peter ii.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—410, 645, 419.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TAKING HOLD UPON GOD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 7TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee."—Isaiah lxi. 7.

ISAIAH in the chapter before us describes a very mournful condition of the people of God. He feels the case to be so desperate that he sighs for a divine interposition—"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down." He perceives that the people are so steeped in slumber, so utterly under the power of their sins that, unless God himself shall descend with all the power and terror of Sinai, the nation will utterly perish through its iniquity, even as withered leaves are blown away by the fierce winds. He longed for a melting fire to dissolve their hard hearts; for a swift flame such as burns the brushwood on the mountain's side to make a speedy end of their false confidences; and for a burning heat, such as maketh the waters to boil, to remove the lukewarmness of those who professed to worship the Lord.

I do not know that the condition of the church of God at the present time is quite so bad as that which is here described. It would be wrong to boast of our condition, but it would be worse to despair of it. It would not be honest to apply the words of our text to the church of the present day. Blessed be God, we could not say, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee," for there are many who plead day and night for the prosperity of Zion. Yet in a measure we are somewhat in the same plight as that which is described by the prophet, and there is much to mourn over. Prayer languishes in many churches, power in intercession is by no means a common attainment, and meetings for prayer are, as a rule, thinly attended, and not much thought of. Sin abounds, empty profession is common, hypocrisy is plentiful, and the life of God in the soul is but little esteemed.

Notice carefully that according to our text the prophet traces much of the evil which he deplored to the lack of prayer. After he has compared their righteousnesses to filthy rags he adds, "there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." When

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there is a degeneracy of public manners, you may be sure that there has also occurred a serious decline of secret devotion. When the outward service of the church begins to flag and her holiness declines, you may be sure that her communion with God has been sadly suspended. Devotion to God will be found to be the basis of holiness and the buttress of integrity. If you backslide in secret before God, you will soon err in public before men. You may judge yourselves, my dear hearers, as to your spiritual state by the condition of your hearts in the matter of prayer. How are you at the mercy seat? for that is what you really are. Are the consolations of God small with you? That is a minor matter; look deeper,—Is there not a restraining of prayer before the living God? Do you find yourself weak in the presence of temptation? That is important; but search below the surface, and you will find that you have grown lax in supplication, and have failed to keep up continual communion with God.

The prophet also reveals the very essence and soul of prayer. It is a stirring up of one's self to take hold of God. If in prayer we do not take hold of God, we have prayed but feebly, if at all. The very soul of devotion lies in realising the divine presence, in dealing with God as a real person, in firm confidence in his faithfulness,—in a word, in "taking hold of him." Men do not take hold of a shadow, they cannot grasp the unsubstantial fabric of a dream. Taking hold implies something real which we grasp; and there is wanted to make prayer truthful and acceptable with God the grip and grasp of a tenacious faith, which believes the fact that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Taking hold implies a reverent familiarity with the Lord, by which we use a holy force to win a blessing from his hand. It was because there was so little of this in Israel, that the nation had fallen into so forlorn a state; and if you trace up the evils of the church at the present day to their source it will come to this, that there are so few who stir up themselves to take hold upon the living God, so few who grapple with spiritual matters in downright earnest, and bring them before the Lord with resolute faith. We have few Elijahs now, and Jacobs are hard to find. Why, look ye, sirs, there are many whose religion is nothing but a mere outward performance, it consists in attendance upon a place of worship so many times on the Sabbath, the reading of prayers in the family, the repetition of a form of devotion night and morning, and perhaps the mechanical reading of a chapter; but there is no consciousness that God is near, no converse with him, no taking hold upon him. In the case of such persons the "Thou God seest me" of Hagar in the wilderness has never leaped from their lips, neither have they cried like David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." God is far off from them even when they pray: they never dream that they are speaking into his ear. They believe there is a God, but they act as if there were none. He does not influence them, their lives are not inspired by his presence, or ennobled by his smile. Their religion is practically godless, and therefore worthless. In vain is it that they are regular at services and attentive at sermons if their hearts stop short of God himself. Their service may be in all respects proper and orderly, but if there be no taking hold of God it is lifeless and useless: a garnished sepulchre, and not a temple. "God

with us," in our flesh, is our Saviour: "God, with us," by his Spirit, proves that we are saved.

Laying hold upon God is not the act of a dead man, neither is it the deed of one who is destitute of spiritual perception; it is the act of one who is quickened and kept alive by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Those who are at enmity with God neither can nor will take hold of him, for "they say unto God, depart from us: for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

Men will do anything sooner than stir up themselves to take hold of God: they will build churches, and rear altars, and say masses and perform pilgrimages, and a thousand other things, but they do not want God, and will not have him. To go through a round of performances is very easy work compared with thought, and consideration, and the yielding of the heart. You may in religious matters make yourself like the brickmaker's blind horse, which goes round and round at his puggmill, but knows nothing about what he is doing. Such worship God regardeth not: as well might we set automaton to pray and wax figures to move in and out of church doors. God is a Spirit, and to grasp a spirit is not everyday work. Only a spiritual man can do anything of the kind or know what it means. A man must be stirred up and have all his faculties awake, and his entire mental and spiritual nature thrown into energetic action before he will be able to cope with this mystery, and take hold on him that made the heavens and the earth, who is not seen of the eye nor heard of the ear, and is only to be apprehended by the inner spirit of man. I pray God that I may be helpful, as he shall please, in stirring up many of you to take hold upon the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength. If such shall be the case, it will be a great blessing to the churches to which you belong, a great blessing to the society in which you move.

At this present I shall not attempt more than the task of describing certain forms in which taking hold upon God is exceedingly desirable at this present time. The same principle in different stages of spiritual life is seen in varying forms, let me point out four of the most needful; and may the Holy Ghost enable some among us to stir up themselves for the holy effort.

I. The first form of taking hold, that which is intended in the text, is that in which THE AWAKENED SINNER TAKES HOLD UPON GOD; and here I shall be addressing myself, I hope, to many now present who are sincerely anxious to find present salvation. If you really wish to be reconciled to God, and to be pardoned by the great Father at once, hearken diligently unto me, and hear, that your souls may live. Your only hope lies in taking hold upon God. Startle not, but hearken and obey. It is great condescension on the Lord's part that he should permit it to be so, but so it is, that when he bares his right arm to smite you your safety lies in grasping that very hand which apparently is lifted for your destruction. He says by the mouth of the prophet, "Let him lay hold on my strength, and let him make peace with me." As a child when his father is about to chasten him will often seize his father's hand and with many tears entreat him to forbear the rod, so will you do if you act wisely. You are to run in, as it were, into God, and shelter in the very rock which frowns upon you. Though he seemeth to be a destroyer,

if you can but trust him you will find him to be your Saviour. You must say, as John Bunyan once did, "I was so driven that I would have run to Christ, even if he had stood with a pike in his hand, yea, I would have run upon the very point thereof sooner than be as I then was." It is so wretched a thing to be without God that one may gladly dare any calamity in venturing to approach him, though in truth there is no cause for fear. God has been pleased to reveal himself in the person of his dear Son Jesus Christ, who lived and died for the salvation of men; and whosoever will trust God as he is revealed in Christ Jesus shall find forgiveness for all his sins, shall obtain a new nature, shall enter upon a new life, and shall be the heir of a blessed immortality. This is the way of salvation which God appoints, namely, that you now at once heartily trust in his Son.

However strange this method may appear to you, judge not according to the sight of the eyes, but accept what the Lord sets before you. That must be best for you which God thinks best: if it satisfies your Maker it may well satisfy you. But indeed you have no choice; you are shut up to this one method of deliverance. Trust in Christ will save you; but "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Do you understand me? The way of life is to take hold of God in Christ Jesus. You are charged with sin: do not deny it, for such a course will be your ruin: take hold upon the accusation, and confess it. Stand where the accusation places you in conscious guilt, and repent as you stand there: then turn you unto God, and say to him, "It is written in thine own word, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Lord, *Thou* knowest I am a sinner, and *I* also feel it. I cast myself upon the faithful saying, and trust in thee to save me through Jesus Christ thy Son." This is taking hold upon God, and when you have so done you shall find salvation; yea, you are saved.

I think I hear you say, "But how shall I take hold on God? I who am so vile, so weak, so far off from him." He has given you many points by which you may grasp him. You may take hold upon certain of his attributes, and especially upon his mercy. "He delighteth in mercy." Can you not trust the God who is ready to pardon, and eager to receive his returning child? Remember his lovingkindness, and the multitude of his tender mercies, and call to mind the fact that he has declared that he hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he should turn to him and live. Can you not cast anchor in the harbour of infinite mercy, as seen in the provision of a divine Saviour? Can you not find foothold for faith on that blessed and sure word, "His mercy endureth for ever"? This is the star of the sinner's night, the dawn of his day of hope. There is forgiveness with God that he may be feared; with him is plenteous redemption. O poor sinking soul, take hold of this, believe that God for Christ's sake can justly pardon the guilty, and plead with him to do so in your case. Urge your suit upon this plea, and it will not fail you.

Perhaps your mind can better settle upon a promise. Well, it will little matter which one of them it is, for though they are very many, they are all equally certain; but do try to take hold of the Lord by one

or other of those hand-holds which he has provided on purpose for seeking souls. Hold him by such a word as this, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Or take hold upon that other gracious invitation, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." There are many such words of grace, and, as I have already told you, they are all equally sure. Like the great roads which all meet in London, so any promise will lead you to God. Fix your grasp of faith on that which best suits your character and condition, and you are at once in contact with God: only do take hold, and do not trifle with the promise, or stagger at it. O sinner, arouse yourself to take hold upon the loving word; be in earnest, man, for it is your life, and when you once get hold, let your grip be as an iron vice, grapple the promise to thee as with hooks of steel. Plead after this fashion, "Thou hast said it, O God, and I believe it, and I trustfully look to thee to be as good as thy word. On this thy promise I depend, and I am persuaded thou wilt keep thy word."

Perhaps the character of our Lord Jesus Christ may furnish you with a holdfast. Remember who and what he was, and remember that whatever Christ was that God is, for he himself testified, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Recollect how Jesus put the message of love, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Could you not trust the meek and lowly one? Say, can you not readily trust Jesus? Do you fear Immanuel or dread the Lamb of God? Bleeding on the tree, with no thunder in his hand nor terror on his brow, can you not confide in him? His dying body by every wound invites the sons of men to find a shelter in the riven rock. Take at once firm hold of God. The body of his incarnate Son and all his blessed doing and dying stand before you as so many points of attraction. Turn not away, but let the God of love be your God now and for ever.

Can you not take hold of him through the gospel: the gospel which publishes salvation to the most ungodly? What say you to this, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"? "He that believeth on him is not condemned." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." What a number of persons have laid hold of God through that precious text. It stands like an open door with width enough to admit a giant in sin. Some who could never find comfort anywhere else have caught at that encouragement, and found peace with God at once. Why should you not? Note this one also. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," and this, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." By some one or other of those gospel declarations I do in the name of Jesus entreat every guilty sinner to take hold of God. Again, I say, do not run from him, or from the facts of your sad case: do not try to forget what you are towards him, nor forget what he must be towards you if you continue in your sin; but come now in an honest manner,

and meet the truth face to face. Make this firm resolve, that you will be a stranger to your God no longer. Say in your soul, "I will take hold of God this day, as he presents himself to me in his word." Put forth your hand and touch the hem of Jesus' garment if you can do no more, and he will not spurn you, but give you immediate salvation.

The text speaks of a man's stirring up himself to lay hold on God, and that is the point to which I long to see you brought. I would that every unconverted man were at this moment aroused out of his deadly slumber. You will not take hold on God while you are asleep in sin's downy bed. Believe me, no sinner is saved while his mind is in a dreamy, hesitating, lethargic condition. You need to be stirred up to make your calling and election sure. Surely such a business should be earnestly attended to. Let your memory be stirred up to recollect your sin, and your soul to repent of it. Let your conscience be stirred up to remind you of the guilt of that sin, and your heart to make a full confession of it with deep shame and bitter sorrow. Let your fears be stirred up to apprehend the wrath to come, and your hopes to remind you of the possibilities of everlasting life and glory. Let your desires be awakened this morning, and may you be set longing and crying after mercy; and with your desires may your will awaken, only not as it has been accustomed to be, in vicious obstinacy, setting itself against God, but made willing to obey in the day of the Lord's power. May his Holy Spirit arouse reason and thought, understanding and the affections, yea, your whole man. As when in business you are about to do something of extreme importance you arouse yourself and endeavour to have all your wits about you, so now come to this great business of your soul's salvation with all your thoughts aroused and all your energies excited, for all these are needful. Is it not a concern of the utmost weight? Since the prize is worth the winning, and the loss will be intolerable, be stirred up with strong resolve that, if grace and mercy are to be had by laying hold on God, you will have them at this very hour.

Brethren beloved, if there are none among us who take hold on God our church is in a very sad state; a church without converts is a cloud without rain, a river without water. I thank God that we are not in such a plight, but we have many in this place who have lately taken hold upon the Lord, and found grace in his sight. This has been a means of grace to us all; the oldest and most established have been cheered by these new converts. Their coming among us has been a dew from the Lord; we have welcomed them as men do swallows in the spring. Their addition to our numbers has lit up new stars in our sky. Pray, my brethren, that there may be many such in all churches, for it is pre-eminently desirable that every awakened sinner should be stirred up to take hold upon God.

II. We will now consider another character considerably in advance of the former, who also stirs up himself to take hold of God. We very greatly need to have among us many THOROUGH BELIEVERS WHO TAKE HOLD UPON GOD BY FIDELITY TO HIM. I have seen applied to Calvin the motto, "He took fast hold." If ever a man did take fast hold on invisible things, it was that famous reformer. What he grasped he held with force of clear conviction, intelligent apprehension, and devout reverence. I am particularly anxious that

every member of this church should now look upon himself or herself separately and distinctly, and try to follow me in my description of a believer who takes hold of God. He is deeply sincere and thorough in all that he does. Shams and pretences are his abhorrence. He feels the solemn importance of dealing in spirit and in truth with the Lord, and of taking hold upon God himself and not on mere names and words and forms. He says within himself, "I am a Christian, and I will be so, by God's grace, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. I know that the outward form of religion is but a husk, and I resolve to feed upon the kernel. The substance of religion I mean to have, and not its shadows. I will take hold of all the outward which God has revealed; but I will mainly look to the inward, and my soul and spirit shall deal with the living God himself. If I live, I will live unto him: nothing short of this shall content me." Such a man opens his Bible and resolves to find out what God's will is, and he judges for himself, for he knows that he will have to render a personal account. He means to take hold for himself of every revealed truth, for he wishes not to be taught of man alone, but to be taught of God. He arouses all his wits to understand the doctrine and precepts of God's word; for he has become a disciple, and he therefore wishes to learn. His cry is, "I want to be thorough, I want to go to the soul and centre of things, and know truth by the teaching of the Spirit of God in my own heart. Not content with searching the word alone, he takes everything he finds there to God, and says, "Lord, I long to lay hold of thee in this truth. I desire not merely to know concerning Christ, but to know Christ. Not only to believe the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, but to feel the power of the Holy Ghost himself upon my soul, for I have said in my heart, 'My God, I would know thee and commune with thee, love thee and serve thee. My soul followeth hard after thee; when shall I come and appear before thee.'" Such a man, dear brethren and sisters, when he once knows the will of the Lord, has made up his mind to act promptly upon what he knows; his mind is expressed in the language of one of old, who said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." It is nothing to him what others may do, except that he regrets that they should do amiss. He puts his foot down and will not run with a multitude to do evil. He has made the word of the Lord to be the guide of his life, and he will not depart therefrom. His is no borrowed faith; he has embraced the truth of Jesus for himself, and he means to follow him at all hazards; and, as far as he can, he will have his household so ordered that all who come around him may see that Jesus is his Lord. Come fair or come foul, his hold is taken, and he will not leave it.

Such a man sets himself to extend the kingdom of Christ, impelled by inward zeal. Having obtained a solid fulcrum of assured knowledge, he now begins to use his lever and work upon others. Wherever he is settled in providence he sets about founding a church for his Lord. He is glad to be a member of a numerous church for the sake of Christian fellowship, but if he is cast in a desert place he can hold his own alone, for his hold is not on man, but on God. He can testify in the midst of others who fear not God; he would testify in the midst of heathen if he were called to it, for opposition and persecution cannot shake him. He

has taken hold of God; not of the church, nor of the minister, nor of the mere formal creed; he has passed beyond all things to the Lord himself, and his confidence is thus above the heavens. He knows that he cannot be placed where God is not, and therefore he feels that his best friend is always near. The eye of man is nothing to him, the presence of God is first and last with him.

He labours with earnest zeal to maintain and defend, and also to spread abroad, the truths which are verily believed among us. He is a man that calleth upon God, not merely in prayer, but by confessing his name, and owning his cause; and he stirs up himself to take hold upon God in the doing of all these things. Brethren, I earnestly wish that every member of this church was a man of this metal: we should be strong for God if this were the case. We have so many professors who are still babes, needing the feeding-bottle and the perambulator though they are forty years of age; what can we do with these? Others are unstable; they know something about truth, but not very much, and what they do know they are not sure of, and so they are ready to be bamboozled out of it. In the present age if any man can talk well he will get a following, whatever he may teach. I am astounded at some professors, who can hear this man to-day and that man the next, though the two are diametrically opposed. Surely there is some difference between truth and error, and mere cleverness cannot neutralize false doctrine. Our forefathers discerned between things that differed, and when false doctrine came before them they cast it out, notwithstanding the eloquence of its advocate. I do not want you to be bigots. God deliver us from their bitter spirit, but I do want you to be sound believers. There is a great difference between obstinate bigotry and a decided maintenance of that which we have believed. After all, what is the chaff to the wheat? There is a difference between the doctrines of men and the teachings of the Lord. No lie is of the truth. Garnish it as you may, it is still a lie. Oh to be rooted and grounded and built up in Christ! One of the most desirable things in this fickle age is to see around the minister of Christ a people who know the truth, and feel that the truth binds them fast to their God.

III. We take a step further in advance when we mention a third form of this taking hold of God. We need a development in the form of **THE WRESTLING PLEADER**. The expression is borrowed, as you know, from Jacob at the brook of Jabbok. He had begun to pray alone by the brook when an angel appeared to him, or rather the prince of angels himself. When Jacob saw the angel he laid hold upon him, and there was a wrestling match between them all through that night. It was a sight such as never did earth see before. After much weeping and agony, Jacob made a desperate clutch at the angel and cried, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me." In the church of God we need many wrestling Jacobs. What means the text when it speaks of a man stirring himself up to take hold of God? The transaction takes this form. The good man feels the case urgently: the blessing which is wanted is laid on his heart, and he feels that he must have it. He is convinced of the necessity of it, and he is also certain that he cannot have it, except from God. Then he looks at the propriety of it and asks, "Is this a case which I can lawfully lay before God? I seek

such a thing, but may I expect the thrice holy God to give it me? Is it for his glory? When you have done that, dear friend, you have commenced well; now proceed to business. Go about it in an energetic but reasonable way; and next, turn to the Bible and see if the Lord has ever promised that which you seek. Search out promises, get them ready to your hand, learn their very words: then go before God and tell out your desire, and honestly declare your reasons for desiring it. Show the Lord that you know that he has promised the blessing, and then begin to plead with him to fulfil his own word. Very much of taking hold upon God must lie in using argument with him. The Lord knows the thing is good, but he wants *you* to know it, and in order that you may be well instructed in the value of the mercy you seek he wishes you to produce your arguments and bring forth your strong reasons. Many teachers use what we call the Socratic method, in which the boy is made to answer questions, not that his teacher may be instructed, but that the youth may learn. Set your case in order, and mention your pleadings before the Lord as if you were pleading in a court of justice; state why and wherefore this thing should be, and what you fear will happen if you be not answered. Return to the work again and again, as Abraham did when interceding for Sodom, and each time renew your strength. Especially bring forth the divine promises, and say concerning each one of them, "Do as thou hast said. Fulfil this word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." Plead the covenant and the faithfulness of God. That done, believe that God will keep his promise, and begin to expect the blessing. Act as if you had obtained it, for it is written, "Believe that ye have it, and ye shall have it." If the mercy be not then given, ask again—go through the same pleadings as before, amending them and increasing their power. The agony of prayer is somewhat like a great siege, in which one earthwork is cast up, and after awhile it is followed by another yet nearer to the town which is to be taken. One after another the besiegers raise their works till the place is quite hemmed in; then they bring up their guns, and begin to pound away upon the walls which they have resolved to capture. Thus must we go about to win the blessing which we need, using divine promises as our ramparts, and our strong reasons as our great guns. Remember it is not for God's sake that you are called upon thus to plead, but for your own. The Lord desires to convince you of the value of mercy, and when he has done it he intends to grant it to you.

A man who can take hold of God in prayer will be of the utmost value to the church. Why should we not learn this art? But oh how few there are who call upon his name, who stir up themselves to take hold of God. Sleepy prayers: God have mercy upon them! Prayers that do not mean anything! Prayers of men who can be put off with "No:" these are as common as stones on the road, and of less worth. We need importunity; the knocking at the gate of mercy again and again and again. We need the unconquerable resolve: "I must have it; it is for God's glory, and he has promised it, and I will not cease until I obtain it." We need to see the majesty of prayer among us again. If we had hundreds of church members who could take hold upon God, religion would revive, and we should no more have to complain of barrenness. God will rend the heavens and come down, and the

mountains will flow at his presence, when once his people take him at his word and pray as if they believed.

IV. The fourth point, and the last, is to mention one other form of this stirring up of ourselves to lay hold of God. It is one which I confess I have but seldom seen, and wish I could see on all sides. I have read of it in biographies, and past ages have seen it, and wondered at it. It ought, however, to be common in the church, and to be seen in every Christian. I mean **THE TAKING HOLD OF GOD BY THE STRENGTHENED BELIEVER**: the man who has got beyond doubts and fears, and grasped the eternal verities. No question now as to whether there is a God or no: he knows him, speaks with him, walks with him. In sacred communion the Lord has made known his secret to him, and shown him his covenant. Concerning the gospel, and things revealed, he does not care to argue: he is as sure of those matters as of the fact that there is a sun in the heavens or salt in the sea. He has passed beyond argument as to things of this sort. You might as well try to shake the earth out of its place as to remove him from his convictions: he knows them, and what is a great deal more, he intensely realizes them. He as much believes in God and his gospel as he believes in his own existence: and these things have as manifest power over him as the things which are seen and heard have over the human senses. He is familiar now with God, he talks with Jesus; the Holy Ghost dwells in him. He has passed into a spiritual realm, and has consciously to do with spiritual things. Such a man is now quite sure about God's being with him, for he dwells in his presence, and he never dares to act except under a sense of that presence. He is quite sure about God's keeping his promises, he dares not doubt that, for he has had too many proofs already of the faithfulness of God for him to distrust him. Now, see how steadily that man moves about: trial does not bow him down, he expected it, and he expects to be delivered out of it. If you rush in upon him with the most terrible information it does not distress him, for "he is not afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." What a grand character Abraham was, and only because he was grandly believing. Whenever faith gave way in Abraham, as it did now and then, for the best of men are only men, then he sank to the ordinary level, as he did when he denied his wife and said—"She is my sister." But when his faith is strong what a wonderful man he is. He never disputes with Lot about which shall take the fattest pasturage. Lot may have what he likes, for Abraham has his God. Lot may take the well-watered plain of the Jordan if he desires it, Abraham had sooner dwell alone with his God. When Lot is carried captive, and he feels it his duty to deliver his relative, he does not ask about how strong Chedorlaomer and the other three kings may be; that is nothing to him, God is with him, and he hastens to the conflict. He uses such means as are at hand, and asks his neighbours to join him in the pursuit, and then he marches confidently after Chedorlaomer, and smites him, and God gives the plundering host like driven stubble to his bow. You never find Abraham fretting, he is always peaceful in mind; he is not afraid of men, nor abashed before princes. His faith had made him heir of the world, and he knew it. He moved majestically, because he had learned to believe in God. When Isaac was to be offered up, how the strong man smothered his emotions, and went silently but

resolutely his three days' journey with his son, to the hill of which God had spoken to him. There the deed would have been done, had not the angel interposed, for it never entered into his mind to disobey the Lord. He believed so firmly in his God that whatever God had bidden him he resolved to do. Oh, could you get to the same realizing faith, how calm, quiet, serene, strong, happy, blessed would you be, for you would then to the fullest extent have taken hold of God. When we have such a man in a church he is a man of power in all respects. When he speaks it is almost as the oracles of God. Other speakers may dazzle you with eloquence, but this man overpowers you with grace and confounds the adversaries by his boldness. God gives to the church every now and then such a man. Such a one was Martin Luther, a man by no means free from faults, but gloriously free from doubt. Others think the gospel is true: Erasmus feels sure that it is, but Erasmus wants to die in a whole skin. Luther knows that justification by faith is right, and he will thunder it out, whether his skin shall be damaged or no. It will be better not to go to Worms, say timid advisers; things have come to such a pass that there will be danger to life:—you had better give up the contest, Luther, before you die in it. Future ages may take it up, but if you go to Worms you will certainly never come back again! Well, saith he, I shall go: yea, if there were as many devils there as there are tiles on the housetops, I should go, for I have to confess Christ there, and confess him I will. And when he is asked, "What would you do if the duke, your protector, should no longer harbour you?" "I shall take shelter," says he, "beneath the broad shield of the Almighty God." What are dukes and princes to such a man? He had taken hold of God, and he feels stronger than all men and all devils combined. There is nothing like this linking of one's self with the Eternal by faith. Such a man was Calvin. I picture him as he looked when going into the church of St. Peter, the libertines resolved that they would partake of the Lord's Supper, though he had declared they should not. They are men licentious in life and godless in character, but they mean to come to the table and take the sacred elements, whether he will or not. They care for no one, and mean riot and bloodshed. If he refuses they have sent him word that they will kill him in the church. He goes to the table and breaks the bread, and distributes it to the people of God, and hands not a mouthful to the profane, upon whom he looks with such pitying severity that, awed by the man's courage, they retire to learn better manners. We have in these days a race of time servers and word spinners to succeed the real men. There are hundreds who say it is undoubtedly untrue that children are in their baptism made members of Christ, children of God, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, but still we will teach children to say so, and afterwards we will tell them that the words mean something else. Is this the way of doing the work of the Lord? Is this according to the gospel of faith, or after the manner of truth? Numbers of others say, "Yes, we see all this, we see popery coming back in the form of ritualism, but, at the same time, we cannot be decided, and shake ourselves clear of the accursed thing. We cannot tell what will happen; we will wait, and perhaps fate may favour us." I know what would happen if we feared

God more: we should sooner die than remain in any fellowship with popery. Every man who saw any fear of his being found in complicity with Antichrist would at once say, "I will not have it. Popery is abhorred of the Lord, and they who help it wear the mark of the beast. I hate Antichrist, and therefore I denounce it and cry, Down with it, raze it even to the ground." Everything that is of the Pope and popery would soon be put aside if men were but true to their consciences and their God. This generation is credulous, and yet unbelieving. It is deluded by the most transparent frauds. It swings like a pendulum to this and that; it believes in almost anything except its God, but in God and his truth and righteousness it will not be made to believe. Oh for a John Knox! We need a leader, firm and heroic, a man strong and stout because he has God with him. He that believeth in God will make men decide for the right when else they would vacillate. He is a commander-in-chief among the sons of men. His brow is like a flint, and he is not to be abashed. Let criticism rattle upon his armour like a hail-storm, he standeth fast and defies it all. May God make some of you into such heroes. I would to God he would make all of you valiant for truth, so that in your little circle you would be firm for God and scriptural doctrine and pure worship, because you have taken hold of him. God save us from the men of willow, and gutta serena, and plaster of Paris, such as would be dear if you could buy them at a shilling the dozen. Take these away, O father Time, and give us back men of granite, men of backbone, say rather, men of God. Oh that each man among us were aroused to take hold of God, and that all our faculties were stirred to their utmost depth, and that then they grasped the Lord. Ho comrades, see ye not the standard! It wavers! Shall it fall? The true soldier in the cruel fight, when he sees the standard-bearer struck down, and the fight thickening all around the banner, stirreth up all his strength and rushes into the strife, as a lion leaps on his prey. He strains every sinew, and throws every nerve into action, dashing forward to grasp the standard and to hold it aloft, touch it who dare. He smites right and left, and sooner than the banner shall be trailed in the mire, he will spill his life in crimson streams upon the ground. Up ye soldiers of Christ! Up ye lion-like men, and turn the battle to the gate! May God help you to do it for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah lxiv., and
lxv. 1—10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—676, 674, 660.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE RIGHTEOUS FATHER KNOWN AND LOVED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 14TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee. but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."—John xvii. 25, 26.

THESE are the last sentences of our Lord's most wonderful prayer. May they not be regarded as the flower and crown of the whole intercession? Minds usually burn and glow and reach their highest fervour as they proceed, and it will not be wrong to conceive of the Saviour as having here reached the climax of his pleading, the summit of his supplication. He has kept the best wine until now, and brings forth his richest sentences last. How, then, shall our slender ability attain to "the height of this great argument"? It is far beyond our little skill to draw forth all the sweets which lie within these words like ointment in a box of alabaster. For their full consideration a lifetime would be too brief, and the mind of the most grace-taught believer too feeble. Here are great deeps which neither reason nor thought can fathom nor experience fully know. Only the scholars of the New Jerusalem who have for ages studied the manifold wisdom of God in the glorious work of redemption, and perhaps not even they, would be able to tell out all that the Saviour meant by these most simple but yet most pregnant words. John's gospel is always easy for the child to read, but it is always hard to the man to understand; and these two verses, which are almost entirely made up of words of one syllable, contain mysteries which baffle the most enlightened understanding. When I consider what they veil, I am constrained to cry out, "O the depths!" I can only hope to present to you a few grains of gold which have been washed down by the streams of meditation, but I cannot take you to the secret mines from which the treasures have been borne. It shall need your own experience and the personal teaching of the Holy Ghost for you to know the height and depth of the truths here spoken of, and it shall even with these require death and resurrection

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and a sight of the eternal glory to qualify you wholly to comprehend them.

There are two things in the text manifest to every careful reader. There is, first, *a knowledge which is exceedingly peculiar and inestimably precious*—"O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me." In connection with this knowledge you will observe that there is *a great teacher*, who first knows for himself that which he teaches—"I have known thee"—and then communicates his knowledge—"And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it." That fruitful theme shall furnish the first topic of our meditation. May the Holy Ghost lead us into it. The second part of the text is not knowledge, it is that to which all divine knowledge is intended to lead, namely, love. The twenty-sixth verse speaks of wonderful discoveries of *a love of infinite excellence*: "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them." And you notice that in order to bring that love home to us there is *a divine indweller*, who goes with it, and without whom it could not be. As a teacher is required to bring us the choice knowledge, so an indweller is needful to infuse into us the infinite love—"And I in them." Jesus must teach us or we shall not know the Father; he must dwell in us or we shall not rejoice in his love. Thus our first subject is divine knowledge and the divine instructor, and our second subject is indwelling love and the indwelling Lord. The two are one; the blessed person of our Lord Jesus is so connected with both, and so unites both, that the subject is one. To know God in Christ Jesus is to love him, and to be loved of him is the cause of our being made to know him. When Jesus declares the Father's name we both know and love, and when we see the Father in the Son we are filled both with instruction and affection.

I. Our text speaks of *A KNOWLEDGE OF INFINITE VALUE AND ITS TEACHER*. What is that knowledge? Jesus tells us in verse 26—"I have declared unto them *thy name*." God has made man, and naturally man ought to know his Maker. The creature should acquaint itself with its Creator, the subject should know the name of his King; but by reason of the blindness of our heart, through the depravity engendered by the Fall, and also by reason of each man's personal sin, there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. Whatever else fallen man desireth to know (and by nature he is ever ready to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil), yet he desires not to know his God, but saith unto him, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Yet it is evident that a man can never be in a proper state till he knows his God, and is at peace with him. A man who is totally ignorant of God must be in a dark state of mind, and since he loves that darkness it is plain that his mind is biassed against good. His wilful ignorance of God proves his enmity to him. While man is opposed to God he cannot be happy, holy, or safe: how can he be when he fights against one who is perfect holiness and love? Our Lord Jesus Christ therefore, in coming to save us, makes it a part of his office to reveal the Father to us. He brings us the knowledge of the glory of God, for it shines in his own face. "God was manifest in the flesh." Man must know God in order to be saved, and therefore the Lord Jesus of old promised in the twenty-second Psalm, "I

will declare thy name unto my brethren," and here in our text he confesses, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it." By the term "*name*" he means the existence of God, the nature of God, the character of God, the work of God, the revelation of God, for the word "*name*" is a peculiarly expressive word in Scripture, and comprehends all that by which a person is properly described. In this case it comprehends the whole of God, and our Lord Jesus Christ has come to make God known to us to the full. He says, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." This should suggest to each of us a searching question, Do I know the Lord? If you do not, it is quite certain that our Lord's words apply to you, "ye must be born again." Without a knowledge of God you bear evidence that you are still in nature's darkness, and in the natural alienation of your spirit. You belong to that world which lieth in the wicked one, of which our Lord said, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee." O that by the teaching of the Holy Ghost you may yet know the Father.

In verse 25 there is a testing name given to God, a name by which we may decide whether we know the name of the Lord or no. What is that? I call your particular attention to it, for my whole subject turns upon it: it is this—"O *righteous Father*." I know not that in any other portion of Scripture God is called by that name. In this prayer Jesus had not addressed his Father by that title before. He had spoken of him as "Father," and also as "Holy Father," but here alone it is—"O righteous Father." Now, I say that the knowledge of this name may serve as a test as to whether you do truly and spiritually know God, or have only a notional and outward idea of him. If you know him aright you know and understand what is comprehended under those two simple words, which are so remarkable when found in combination—"righteous Father." He is "righteous," having the attributes of a Judge and Ruler: just, impartial, by no means sparing the guilty. He is "Father,"—near of kin, loving, tender, forgiving. In his character and in his dealings with his people he blends the two as they were never combined before. How can the judge and the father be found in one? When guilty men are concerned how can both characters be carried out to the full? How is it possible? There is but one answer, and that is found in the sacrifice of Jesus which has joined the two in one. In the atonement of our Lord Jesus "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." In the sacred substitution we see declared how God is "righteous" and yet "Father": in the sublime transactions of Calvary he manifests all the love of a tender Father's heart, and all the justice of an impartial Ruler's sword.

This is the knowledge which our Lord has come to declare among the men whom he has chosen out of the world; and he assures us, first, that this is *peculiar knowledge*. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee." The heathen world knew nothing of a righteous Father; it scarcely knew God as Father; though here and there a heathen poet might speak of men as the offspring of God, the true idea of divine Fatherhood was unknown to sages and philosophers. As to the righteousness of God, they had but clouded notions, a future judgment, and a system of rewards and punishments they saw by the light of natural

conscience, but true righteousness in the governing of the universe they had not spelled out: they knew not because they did not wish to know. Their gods were generally monsters of iniquity. As to righteousness and love being combined, they imagined no such thing; the idea of a god who should be at once sternly righteous and yet infinitely tender had not occurred to them. How could it? Being themselves unrighteous, they sought not after a righteous God; he was not in all their thoughts. Being themselves cruel and loveless, they could not discover a Deity whose name is love. All the wisdom of antiquity went to fabricate gods of quite another kind. The world by wisdom knew not the God who is called "righteous Father."

It is more humbling to have to add that the *Christian* world does not know God as a "righteous Father," but persists in forsaking this grand, glorious, and scriptural view of him. Mark you, I draw a very grave distinction between the Christian church and the Christian world. The Christian world is a conglomeration of good and evil; the embodiment of the unreal and unspiritual, which nevertheless desires to bear the Christian name. It is the world pretending to be the friend of Christ, and you know how hollow is the pretence. The Christian church, made up of the men taught of God and born of the Spirit, is another matter: therein we have something very different, for these know the righteous Father. Sceptics labelled as "thinkers" reject the evangelical idea of God, and the atonement which that idea involves. Worldly wisdom talks of "the universal fatherhood of God," and babbles for ever about that mere dream, that fiction of folly, against which the Bible is a plain and pointed protest. Universal Fatherhood indeed, when our Lord Jesus said, "If God were your Father ye would love me, for I proceeded forth and came from God. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." Is it not described as a special wonder of love that we should be called the sons of God? (1 John iii. 1.) Did not the Holy Ghost say by his servant John, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." The philosophic Christian world knows an effeminate, indiscriminate fatherhood, but not "the righteous Father." It will not bow before the majesty of his justice. According to the tenor of its teaching sin is a misfortune, transgression, a mere trifle, and the souls that suffer for wilful guilt are objects to be pitied rather than to be blamed. The world's "thinkers" are continually drawing upon our feelings to make us pity those who are punished, but they have little to say in order to make us hate the evil which deserved the doom. Sin according to them does not of itself demand punishment, but penalties are to be exacted or remitted for the general good, if indeed they are to be executed at all. All necessary and inevitable connection between guilt and its punishment is denied. They dare to call justice revenge, and speak of atonement as if were a solatium for private pique. The Christian world does not seem to have learned the truth that "a God all mercy were a God unjust," and that a God unjust would soon be discovered to be a God without love, in fact, no God whatever. "Righteous Father!" This is the peculiar revelation which is received by those who have been taught of the Holy Spirit, and to this day Jesus Christ may say, "O righteous Father, the world

hath not known thee." Men kick against the doctrine of the atonement, they quarrel with substitution, they are fierce in their sarcasms against the mention of the precious blood of Christ, and sneer superciliously at those who hold fast the old truth. They stumble at this stumbling stone, and strive evermore to overthrow this rock of truth; and yet, depend upon it, this is the test question by which we shall know whether a man knoweth God aright or knoweth him not.

There is much in this knowledge which renders it very *distinctive*, for it reveals the condition of the mind which receives it. A man who knows God as "righteous Father" shows that he has some knowledge of himself: he has perceived the sin within his nature, and it has burdened him; the righteousness of God has appeared to him in its threatening form, and he had been bowed before it under a sense of his guilt. You can see, too, that the man also knows something of his Saviour: he has evidently seen the Son, or else he would not know the Father, for of old Jesus said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." He has seen God's great gift to man, and learned his boundless love. His knowledge of the "*righteous Father*" shows that his heart has submitted itself to the justice of God. He has been in the place where David stood when he said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." He has evidently bared his back to the lash of punishment, and felt that he deserved all the blows which it could lay upon him. Inasmuch as it knows the Lord as a "*righteous Father*" you can see that the heart has learned to trust God, for no man calleth him Father in spirit and in truth till first he possesses a living faith, and some kindlings of divine love. Submission and trust compose a condition of character which is peculiar to a renewed soul, but will surely be found in a man if he be indeed saved, for it is the mark of being saved from self-justification and from the hatred bred by despair. When we see in a man an unconditional submission to the justice of God, and yet a trustful hopefulness in his boundless love, we may be sure that he is a renewed man. He cries, "Thou art righteous, O my God, and if thou destroy me, I can say no less: but, Father, thou wilt not destroy me, for I perceive that thou art love. Though I see thee grasp thy sword of fire, yet do I trust thee, for I believe thee to be gracious and loving still." The knowledge described in the text is not only peculiar to those who are taught of God, but it reveals peculiarities in them which grace has implanted there. They believe because they are Christ's sheep and know his voice. The life within them receives the living truth. They would not have come to know the "*righteous Father*" unless there had been a change in their character wrought by the Spirit of God; but that once done they know him as of necessity.

I would next say that this knowledge is *eminently consolatory*. It is but little that I know, but I feel that I would cheerfully part with it all so long as I may be allowed to retain the knowledge contained in these two words, "*righteous Father*." This is my life, my light, my love, my delight, my heaven. If all the productions of wit and wisdom throughout all past ages could be as effectually consumed as the Alexandrian library when it was burned to ashes, if man did but retain the knowledge of these two words, "*righteous Father*," he might be content to see the

whole mass pass away in smoke. To know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent is the climax, the essence, the sum total of wisdom. I said that it was consolatory, and so it is to the last degree. For a man to know that God is his Father is delightful beyond measure, to feel that God forgives him as the father forgave the prodigal, that he has received him into his heart and home, as the father did his once lost boy, is unspeakably delightful; but when we further learn that all this is done without the violation of justice, that all this deed of grace is done righteously, and so done that even justice demands it should be done, then are we full of wondering love. Beloved, God is as just in loving his sinful people as he could have been in manifesting his displeasure towards them; as just in forgiving as he could have been in punishing; and this is the glory of the whole matter. This being known we see our position in Christ Jesus to be unassailable. We see that justice cannot punish us, for Jesus has borne our penalty: it cannot demand more at our hand, for our great Substitute has rendered to it the full tale of obedience. In Christ Jesus God is just, and yet our justifier. We are so safe that we begin to challenge opposition, and cry, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" We take up a triumphant note and sing with exceeding joy, "If God be for us who can be against us!" If God be righteous, and yet my Father, then am I saved, and saved in such a way that the attributes of God are glorified by my salvation, and therefore I am most securely and certainly saved. Why should I not rejoice?

One more fact about this knowledge of God as a "righteous Father:" it is a knowledge which *causes its possessor to enjoy much fellowship with Jesus*. Notice how our Lord puts it. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but *I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.*" "I have known thee." Ah, yes, of old the Son of God knew the glorious character of the Godhead; being himself God he knew that justice was an essential attribute of deity, which never, never could be tarnished or made to yield a hair's breadth; and he knew also that God is love, and that his love would never cease to be his special glory and delight. He knew of old that, speaking after the manner of men, these two attributes were each resolved to suffer no eclipse: he knew that each of them must keep its place. God must be just, and must be a Father: consequently, when dealing with sinners, he must smite and he must spare. Our Lord saw how these two necessities stood, like the eternal hills, and how our doom seemed to roll between, and it was he who condescended for our sakes to bring these two together by his own endurance of justice and manifestation of love. He determined to take upon himself our nature, and bear our sin, which was the cause of the quarrel; and then, by enduring the chastisement of our peace, he magnified justice, and to an equal degree glorified love. He came, he saw, and solved the difficulty, and now the judge is as righteous as if he were not love, and the Father is as loving as if righteousness had never been offended. This grand character of God as "righteous Father" was so dear to our Lord, and so much admired by him, that he died to maintain and vindicate it, and when you and I come to know it, I am sure we so much delight in it that we feel we would sooner die than give up the truth. This great revelation of God is not a dogma that may or

may not be accepted; it must be so. I do in my soul believe this truth to be an article of a standing or of a falling Church. If you put away the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, you have disembowelled the gospel, and torn from it its very heart. Nor longer need angels sing glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, if it be not true the union of the divine glory and human salvation is found in Jesus. The glad news dwindles down very lamentably if the atonement is denied; but it cannot be disproved—God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth; Christ has died; that this truth may be clear, and his people live to declare it, and feel that it were worth a thousand martyrdoms to maintain it. Herein we have fellowship with Christ, for he knows the “righteous Father,” and rejoices in him, and we know the “righteous Father” too in Christ, and love and bless him, and wonder at him every day more and more.

Thus I have to the best of my power described the invaluable knowledge. May we all be taught of the Lord, and all know him, from the least to the greatest.

Now, this knowledge comes to us by a *teacher*. That teacher is spoken of in verse 26. “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it.” Our beloved Lord has most fitly declared to us this name of “righteous Father,” for he himself knows it as none other can know it; and he here confesses this intimate knowledge, saying, “but I have known thee.” “No man knoweth the Father save the Son,” and the Son knows the rectitude of the Father’s government, and the love of the Father’s heart beyond all others. Is he not himself “very God of very God”? and does he not perceive this wondrous union of the two ranges of attributes in the person of the Father with a clearness of vision which no one else possesses? Fit is it, therefore, that he should declare to us what he hath seen and known of the Father.

He declared the “righteous Father” in his life, for in his life he incarnated truth and grace. Jesus Christ on earth was righteous,—in thought, in word, and in deed. Point me to a sin he ever committed, inculcated, or excused. Righteousness was about him as the atmosphere which he breathed. Well did the psalmist say of him, “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness.” And yet what love there was in him, and pity for the wandering sheep! He mingled with sinners, and yet was separate from sinners; he touched their diseases and healed them, and yet was not defiled by their impurities; he took their infirmities upon himself, and yet in him personally there was no trace of sin. Our Lord was so righteous that you perceived at once that he was not of this world, and yet he was so lovingly human that he was altogether a man among men, and not at all separated from them in the way in which John the Baptist was, who “came neither eating nor drinking,” nor divided from his fellows, as many a man of genius has been, by eccentric modes of thought. He was man’s brother and his physician, his friend and his Saviour. When you want to know the Father’s righteousness and love, read the history of Jesus Christ: nay, know the Lord Jesus himself, and you know the Father.

His death, however, most gloriously illustrated this beyond everything else. Behold, he dies that the “righteous Father” may be seen. He has taken upon himself man’s sin, and he is brought to the place where

man must answer for his sin; he is silent before his accusers, he is condemned and numbered with the transgressors. Now he must die the sinner's death. See, he is nailed to the cross, and now God himself forsakes him, for he has laid the guilt of man upon him, and therefore cannot be present to make his spirit glad. The deserted Saviour cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and well he might, when his own Father in righteousness turned his face from him. Beloved, when Jesus Christ died there was a grander display of the righteousness and the fatherhood of God than could have been possible by any other means: then the mystery was made plain and the depth opened up to its very bottom. O Lord our God, what an abyss of adorable goodness hast thou thus laid bare before us!

"How our hearts tremble at thy love immense!
In love immense, inviolably just!
Thou, rather than thy justice should be stained,
Didst stain the cross with blood of thine own Son."

And now to-day it is the business of our Lord to continue to reveal the righteous fatherhood of God, and he does so by the work of his Holy Spirit. Do you not remember when he revealed it to you? When you were bowed down with grief on account of sin, when you longed to be reconciled to God but could not see how, then the Spirit of God came to you and pointed you to the full atonement made, to the utmost ransom paid, and you clapped your hands for very joy as you perceived that God could be your Father, and receive you as his child, and yet his righteousness need not suffer the slightest diminution. That Spirit of God working on the behalf of Christ is still declaring this among the nations, as the years roll on, opening the eyes of the blind, and bringing his own chosen, one by one, to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and to say, "O righteous Father, I know thee and rejoice in thee." To each one of us who are saved Jesus is declaring this "righteous Father" more and more. I hope I know more of this than I did twenty years ago. Brother, do not you? Sister, do not you? I trust that every day we see a little more of the righteous fatherhood of God, and shall continue to do so, world without end. We shall as we grow in grace look further and further into the wondrous mystery of the justice which was satisfied and the love which furnished the satisfaction. Beloved, it shall be a part of our Lord's joy even in eternity still to declare unto us the name of God the "righteous Father." Will it not be our joy to sit at his feet and learn of him? Is he not a blessed teacher? Has he not been very patient with us? Blessed be his name for all his care and travail towards us. He has taught us much, and means to teach us more. Let us bend a listening ear, and bow a willing heart, while from day to day he shall continue to declare unto us the "righteous Father."

Now, if at any time I should seem to preach the doctrine of the substitution of Christ too often, and if you should say, "He is harping upon the old string," I shall not hesitate to quote my Master's words, and say, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it." This truth is one that needs continual declaration. It should be sounded often in the Christian's ear to keep alive his sense of obligation to the wisdom which

devised, and the love which carried out, the plan of our salvation, to the glory of the "righteous Father."

II. But now, secondly, this heavenly knowledge is not given to us for its own sake alone. Even the high and blessed revelation of the "righteous Father" is not made to us that we may know it and end in knowing, but our Lord says, "*I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*" The object of the knowledge bestowed upon us is the infusion of a LOVE UNRIVALLED IN VALUE, and extraordinary to the last degree. Let us speak upon it.

First notice that this discovery of love which is spoken of in the twenty-sixth verse is *an inward discovery* of it: "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be *in them.*" It was always *on* them, for the Father has always loved his people; but here it is spoken of as "*in them.*" What does that mean? I apprehend it means that they may know it, be persuaded of it, believe it and enjoy it; that they through knowing the righteous name may come to perceive the love of God towards them. Do you not see the connection? Jesus Christ our Lord dies for us that God may be righteous and yet may save us. Is it not clear as a pikestaff to you that God loves his people with a very wonderful love when he gives his own Son to die and satisfy justice on their behalf? Nothing can prove that love so clearly, nothing bring it home so forcibly as the sacrificial death of the Only Begotten. Therefore does Christ declare the blessed name of the "righteous Father" in order that it may come home to you with an unconquerable power that the Father loves you, and loves you beyond conception, seeing that not even his dear Son was so loved as to be spared, but he must die that you might live, and that the justice of God might be satisfied on your account. There is no way of knowing the love of God like knowing the "righteous Father," and the atonement which that character necessitated. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." You may say, "I see his love in every flower that blooms and every breeze that blows." It is true, but it is the same love after all which he has towards a horse or a cow; for do not flowers bloom and breezes blow for them? "We see the love of God," say some, "in giving us meat to eat and raiment to put on." So do I, but this also is the same love which he bears to ravens and to lilies, for does he not feed the one and clothe the other? I want something more by way of love than this. "I see God's love," says one, "in Christ's coming to teach us and make us better." No doubt you do, and so do I, but I do not feel it one half so forcibly as when I gaze upon Calvary and see the innocent Victim bleeding for my crimes. "Herein is love!" When the divine Father gives up his best Beloved for guilty man we may well say, "Behold how he loved him!"

Come and see this spectacle of love. It is none other than the Lord of heaven who must die to vindicate the jealous purity of the divine government. Is he God's only begotten Son, and must he bear man's guilt? Miracle of miracles! Must the spotless Son bear human guilt? He must! He did! Tell it, and let heaven be astonished still, though it has heard the wonder near two thousand years. Upon him who never

sinned the Lord hath laid our iniquities. Bearing that guilt, must he suffer? He must. If God loves his people his Son must suffer in their stead, must suffer shame, must suffer desertion, must suffer death. What, die? Incarnate Deity be put to death? A felon's death? Can this be? It has been! It is finished. Such was the love of God that "he spared not his only begotten Son, but freely delivered him up for us all." Be astonished, O heavens, for ever and ever that love could accomplish such a feat as this. Now, then, Christ has come on purpose to declare the name of God that the love of God may be perceived by us, its power felt, its glory recognized, its greatness wondered at, its infinitude delighted in.

But now notice, and here is the very pith of our subject, that *this love was of a most extraordinary kind*. "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them." What is the love wherewith God loved his Son? Come, you philosophers and divines, come, you who have learned to blend imagination with cool judgment, come and think over this—the love wherewith the Father loved his Son. Believer, he loves you as he loves his best Beloved. He is his only begotten Son: Son in a very mysterious manner, for we comprehend not that divine filiation in which the Father is eternal, and the Son eternal also. He loves you as he loves such a Son. There is more than sonship, there is natural unity of essence, for the Father and Son are one God; and how the one God loveth, how the Father loveth the Son, I know not, save that I know there can be no limit to such love. It must be altogether boundless and unspeakable. Now, if you fully know the righteous fatherhood of God, as Christ would have you know it, you will learn that God loved you as he loved his Son. Do you not see that it is so? If he had not loved you as he loved the Son, he would have spared his Son. Is not that clear? If he had not loved you as he loved his Son he would have said to his Son, "Son, thou shalt never leave heaven for that polluted planet, thou shalt never descend to poverty and suffering, thou shalt never have thy hands and feet pierced, thou shalt never be despised and spit upon and put to a cruel death." But because he loved us as he loved his Son he gave his Son. Will not that fact warm your hearts; will it not burn like coals of juniper within your bosoms? "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift"!

Nay, that is not all. We learn from the verse which precedes our text that the Father loved our Lord eternally: "For thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Perceive, then, that God has also loved thee, dear child of his, from before the foundation of the world. Or ever thou hadst a being his prescient eye foresaw thine existence, and thou wast the object of his love. Why or wherefore I cannot tell thee, but he loved thee, and he loves thee still as he loves his Son. May the power of that love be felt in thy heart now.

It was a love of *complacency and delight*. Remember those words of the Lord which he spake concerning his Son in the day of his baptism, and at two other occasions when the heavens opened: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Always draw a distinction between the love of benevolence with which God loves all his creatures and the love of complacency, which is reserved for his own. He calls his church his Hephzibah, "My delight is in her," he saith not so of the world. God never said concerning any wicked man, "This is my

beloved son, in whom I am well pleased," for he is not pleased with him, but angry with him every day; but concerning all those who know the "righteous Father" it is the prayer of Christ that the love wherewith the Father loves him may be in them, and by that he means that they may feel that the Lord has in them a father's content. Do try if you can to realise this high privilege. It is true, O believer, that God the infinite Father takes pleasure in thee! It is true, but it is very surprising! Often have I turned over that word in the Song where the bridegroom says to the bride, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." How can this be? Why, we are all spots. Yet does the Eternal Father view us in Christ, and in him he takes delight in us as a father does in his children. "My delights were with the sons of men." "He shall rest in his love, he shall rejoice over thee with singing." When you know God as "righteous," and yet "Father," then shall you see that, inasmuch as the righteous way of salvation has put away all sin by laying it upon Christ, there is no reason why the Lord should be angry with us; and inasmuch as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, there is a legal reason why he should be satisfied with his people; and inasmuch as we have become one with Christ, there is good cause why he should take a delight in us, even for his Son's sake.

God the Father loves his Son infinitely. How could he do less? Without beginning has he loved him, and without an end will he love him, and also without change, without limit, and without degree: in the same way doth he love his people, whose hope is fixed in him as the "righteous Father."

This love wherever it reigns in the heart creates a return love to God. You cannot really know all this and enjoy it without feeling, "My God, I love thee in return;" and that high and noble passion works to the cleansing of the soul and the purging out of sin, and so it becomes a sanctifying influence by which a Christian is made to be "holiness unto the Lord."

To close; this love within the soul *comes through an indweller*. Observe the last words of the text, "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, *and I in them.*" What does this mean? I cannot tell you all it means. Let us skim the surface just for a minute. It means this. The Holy Spirit is the representative of Christ now upon earth, and if ever the love of God the Father is to be known by any one of us *the Lord Jesus by the Spirit must be in us*. Without the Spirit of God actually resident in us we cannot know the righteous Father. We are as blind and dead men until he quickens and illuminates us, and all the letter-teaching in the world will benefit us nothing. We must be born again. My dear hearers, there may be some of you to whom all my talk this morning must seem very strange: you cannot see anything in it. Let the fact cause you to suspect that you must be in the dark. When even the love of God to his people becomes a dry theme to you it looks suspicious. Surely you have no part nor lot in it, or else you would relish a discourse upon it. The reason why you do not comprehend it is because you have not the Spirit of Christ, and if you have not the Spirit of Christ you are none of his. May this convince you of

your condition, and may you be led to seek Christ and find everlasting life.

But when the text says that Christ is in his people, it means, besides the indwelling of the Spirit, that *Christ is in us by faith*, for we have taken Christ Jesus as the great atoning sacrifice to be our sole and only confidence, and hence he is in us, trusted and loved, fed upon and believed in. If he be so, then it is quite clear that we know the "righteous Father," and when we know the "righteous Father" then it follows that we must have some discoveries of his great love to us. Are you trusting Christ? Is Jesus in you the hope of glory? Do you trust in him alone? If so, go and drink to the full the sweetness of the text, and let no man say you nay.

Christ is in you moreover *by a real and vital union* with you. You are in him as a branch is in the vine, and he is in you as the sap is in the branch. You are in him as a member is in the body, and he is in you as the life is in all the members. We know that Jesus quickens us, and because he lives we live also. Henceforth we are one with Christ. It must be so, because if God did not see us in Christ he could not regard us with complacency, or in other words love us as he loves his Son. If he did not in looking upon a man see the love and the nature of his Only Begotten in him, how could he love him? He views us as part and parcel of his own dear Son, and so his delight is in us.

Beloved, the Lord sees in addition to all this, *something of a likeness to Christ in us*, wrought by his Spirit, for if Jesus be indeed in us we shall grow to be like him, and shall manifest somewhat of his spirit and nature. The more we have of likeness to Jesus the more will it be evident that the love of God is in us, and is working in us, "to will and to do of his own good pleasure."

May God grant that what I have spoken so feebly may nevertheless be sweetly enjoyed by you, for I am persuaded that in the text there lies many a banquet for saints that hunger and thirst after righteousness, and a depth of mystical teaching which it shall be well for you to search into with all your powers. God bless you, my beloved, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xvii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—425, 226, 728.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE MAGNANIMITY OF GOD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 21ST, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any : he is mighty in strength and wisdom” (or, in strength of heart).—Job xxxvi. 5.

WE cannot wonder that, in the extreme bitterness of his soul, Job was driven to utter some expressions which he would not afterwards have attempted to justify. Among the rest Job had thought and almost said that God had despised him. In the tenth chapter, at the third verse, he appealed to him thus: “Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands?” Elihu, in his zeal to vindicate the righteousness of his Maker, fixes his mind, as I think, upon that expression of Job, and meets it with a positive denial, proving his point from the might and the great-heartedness of the Lord. He had promised to fetch his argument from afar, and therefore he does not argue against God’s despising any from his mercy or goodness, nor give us a commonplace reason for his assertion, such as would easily have suggested itself even to the thoughtless, but he grounds his declaration that God despises no one, and consequently not Job, upon the fact of God’s being mighty. “Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any ; he is mighty in strength of heart.” That form of argument would not have naturally occurred to you or to me ; we might even have been inclined to argue the other way and say—he is so mighty that he cannot be expected to consider such feeble things as his creatures, but he despises them all ; and it is therefore little wonderful that he should despise Job among the rest. Elihu, with far better judgment than the most of us possess, draws quite the opposite inference, and declares that because God is mighty therefore he despises not any.

Facts are convincing arguments, and if you carefully observe you will see that usually those persons who despise others are weak, and if weak nowhere else, are weak in understanding. Those little men who are dressed in brief authority are often harsh and tyrannical, but the truly great are courteous, tender, and considerate. The strong have no reason to be suspicious and jealous, and therefore they are free from envy ; they

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are void of fear of the power of others, and therefore they become anxious that their own power should not be oppressive to the weak ones around them. They become considerate of others because this furnishes a fit sphere for the use of their strength. Yon man, who is only strong in appearance, and is really feeble, despises others because he dreads them, and knowing how much he deserves to be despised himself, he pretends to look down upon his neighbours. It is your half-educated man who sneers; it is your pretender to gentility who gives himself airs. Wherever anything is mere pretence, it endeavours to shield itself from criticism by casting sarcasms upon its rivals. It is said of the Pharisees that they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and despised others: had they been truly righteous they would not have despised others, but because they had a mere veneer of religion, a superficial varnish or gilding of righteousness, or something that looked like righteousness, they affected to look down with supreme scorn upon all who did not make the same show as themselves. God is so great in all things that he despises none: he has no rivals, and has no need to sustain himself by lowering the good name of others. He is supremely real, so true and thorough, that in him there can never be so much as the thought of despising any in order to guard himself. His power is not soon aroused to war, because it has no opposition to fear; his might is associated with gentleness, and fury is not in him, because it is such great might that when it is once in action it devours his adversaries as flame consumes the stubble. God is too great to be contemptuous, too mighty to be haughty.

Note, too, that mere brute force may despise the weak, but the might here ascribed to the Lord is of a higher order. His might is seen not only in that power which rocks the solid world with earthquakes and shakes the heavens with tempests, but in that nobler form of might which reveals itself in wisdom and nobleness of mind. The power of his arm is equalled by the greatness of his spirit. His might lies in his heart,—in his understanding and in his love; he is mighty in spiritual things, in sublimity of thought, grandeur of motive, nobleness of spirit, and loftiness of aim. When you perceive the exaltation of the divine mind and the sublimity of the divine character, you perceive the reason why the Lord does not despise any. To put my meaning into one cumbersome but expressive word, it is the magnanimity of God which prevents his despising any. The sun is so glorious that it refuses not to shine upon a dunghill, the rain is so plenteous that it declines not to drop into the tiny flower-cup, the sea is so vast that it does not hesitate to wait a feather, and God is so mighty that he rejects not the praises of babes and sucklings. If God were little, he might despise the little; if he were weak he would disdain the weak; if he were untrue he would be supercilious to those about him; but, seeing he is none of these, but is God over all blessed for ever, the only wise God, we have to deal with one who, though he be high, hath respect unto the lowly; who, though he humbleth himself even to observe the things which are done in heaven, yet despiseth not the cry of the humble. The magnanimity of God is the reason why he despiseth not any.

By the aid of the Holy Spirit we will this morning first dwell upon *the doctrine*, and then consider *its practical uses*.

I. First, I want you reverently to consider **THE DOCTRINE** that God is mighty, and therefore despiseth not any.

Begin at the beginning: *the Lord is mighty*—that is to say, God is so strong that power immeasurable and inconceivable belongeth unto him. “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.” All that God has already done proves his power, but we cannot even from his greatest works guess at what he is yet able to do. “Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? the thunder of his power who can understand?” Since there is no bound to his power, and it would be sinful to attempt to limit the Holy One of Israel, we are free to believe that the Lord could work on even a more stupendous scale than he has done if so it pleased him. Search as long as you will, and by his help obtain as clear a discovery of divine power as was ever given to mortal mind, but recollect that he is past finding out, and that even if you saw him stand and measure the earth, and drive asunder the nations, and cause the everlasting mountains to be scattered, and the perpetual hills to bow, you would yet have to say with Habakkuk, “There was the hiding of his power.”

With the Lord nothing is impossible. Learn somewhat of his power from the following facts. First, all the power there is in the universe came from God at first, comes from him still, and at his bidding would in a single moment cease. Whatever of force there is in inanimate nature it is but God at work, he set the wheel of nature in motion, and at his bidding it would cease to turn. Whatever mental faculty there may be in cherub or seraph, angel or man, it is but an emanation from his creative energy, a ray from his eternal sun, which would cease if he restrained his might. If Jehovah willed it, yonder enormous orbs, which now revolve in order around the central sphere, would rush in wild confusion to inevitable destruction. The law of gravitation, which holds all things in their places, would be broken in an instant if he withdrew the force which makes the law a power; there would be no coherence among atoms, nay, the atoms themselves would dissolve into non-existence and leave one vast sepulchre, one universal void. Herein is power so great that we cry with Nehemiah, “Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.”

The great God can do all things without help. He needs no assistance from any created thing; indeed, there could be no such aid, since all the power of all other beings is derived from himself alone. Creatures do not contribute to his strength, they only manifest him, revealing the power which they have first of all borrowed from him. To achieve any purpose of his heart he asketh none to be his ally, for alone he doeth as he wills. What is more, he could with equal ease accomplish all his purposes if all created intelligences and forces were against him. It would make no difference to his supremacy of might though all the tremendous powers which have now been created should revolt; he that sitteth in the heavens would have them in derision. Even powers which set up their standard against him are beneath his control: his enemies are his footstool, out of their rage he bringeth forth his peaceful purposes; “he maketh the wrath of men to praise him, and the remainder thereof he doth

restrain." Note well that when God hath done all that he pleaseth he hath not spent his strength. "He fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding." He watcheth always, but he never wearies so as to need to slumber: he worketh ever, but he never pauseth to take rest because of any lassitude or exhaustion; when he hath done all that he hath purposed to do he remains as ready to work as before; when he hath, according to our notions, gone to the utmost of his potency, he is but at the beginning. These are the skirts of his garments, but his full glory is not seen. I tremble while I speak upon that of which I know so little, but assuredly God is mighty in the most emphatic sense that can be conceived by the most enlarged intellect, yea, and far beyond all that hath entered into the heart of man.

The text also tells us that he is "mighty in strength and in wisdom," so that we have to consider that *God is powerful in mind*. "There is no searching of his understanding." He not only possesses physical might, by which he creates, preserves, or destroys, but the higher power of understanding, for "he is wonderful in counsel." "Great is our Lord and of great power: his understanding is infinite." It is difficult to find words to express my meaning, for God is a Spirit, but as far as he may reverently be spoken of as possessing a mind and intellect, he is as omnipotent in that sphere as in the physical world. This is the security of his creatures, that he is a great-minded God. He who has great power of hand is to be dreaded, unless he has corresponding greatness of soul. It is a calamity when the ruler of an empire cannot rule his own spirit. The world has shuddered at Neros and Domitians and Caligulas, who were so weak in character that they broke every law of morality and humanity, and yet had the destinies of nations under their control. Look at the conformation of the heads of those monsters, and they strike you as resembling both prizefighters and idiots, or a combination of the two; and one's blood chills at hearing that such beings were once masters of the Roman world. Happy is it for a nation when the master of its legions is of capacious mind and generous spirit, strong in self-restraint, and irresistible in the force of virtue. In the highest degree we have this in "the blessed and only Potentate." God hath great thoughts, great designs, great wisdom, great goodness.

He is mighty in all respects, and especially in the restraint which he puts upon his wrath. If you wish to see this, look at the forbearance and longsuffering which he manifests towards the disobedient. How matchless is his patience! How enduring his mercy! The wicked provoke him, and he feels the provocation, but yet he does not smite. Week after week they still insult him, they even touch the apple of his eye by persecuting his people, but still he lets the lifted thunder drop, and gives space for repentance. He sends them messages of mercy, he implores them to turn from the error of their ways; but they harden their hearts, they blaspheme him, they take his holy name in vain. Still, by the space of many years he bears with their incessant rebellions, and though he is grieved with the hardness of their hearts, he keepeth back his indignation. This patience is shown, not here and there to one of our race, but to myriads of the human family, and not for one generation only, but from generation after generation still doth his good Spirit strive, still doth he stretch out his hands all the day long even to the

disobedient and to the gainsayers. Not willing that any should perish, he waiteth long and patiently, because he delighteth in mercy.

Equally wonderful, I think, is the power which God hath over his own mind in the ultimate pardoning of many of these transgressors. It is marvellous that he should be able to forgive any, and so perfectly to forgive. It often happeneth to us that we feel compelled to say when greatly offended, "I can forgive you, but I fear I shall never forget the wrong." God goeth far beyond this, for he casteth all our sins behind his back, and he declares that he will not remember them against us any more for ever. What, never! Such deep offences; such heinous crimes! Such provoking transgressions! Shall they never be remembered? What, not even remembered? Shall there not be at least a frown, or a degree of coolness on account of them? No. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." It shows the great-mindedness of God that he should be able to act thus, and to act thus towards the very chief of sinners. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy."

Let me add that when he does not forgive, but when persistent impenitence demands the final doom, God is great-souled even in the punishment of the wicked. He takes no pleasure in the sinner's death; judgment is his strange work. Punishment is never inflicted as a matter of arbitrary sovereignty, but always because demanded by justice. The Lord in vindicating his justice deals not with the poor and the obscure alone, but with the great ones of the earth, plucking down from their high places emperors and kings, red-handed with human carnage, and casting them down to hell. Nor does he on the other hand exercise exceptional severity on the great blasphemer, but he deals with the baser sort also, and does not spare the braggart of the streets who profanes his name. Calmly and impartially doth God deal out justice, "for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." His sentence is so just that none shall be able to gainsay it. Thus he proves the greatness of his mind, for when he does condemn and punish it is never in passion, never in haste, never without exact weighing of evidence. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? "Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." Our God, then, is mighty of heart.

Now, the pith of the doctrine lies here, that *because of his might God despiseth not any*. The proof is very manifest. God is so great and mighty that all things must be little to him. There can be nothing great to the infinite God. There are worlds so ponderous that human reckoning cannot estimate their size, there are worlds so numerous that we have to leave them uncounted, yet separately or apart, or taken altogether in their constellations, all these must be as a drop of a bucket to him. Since, then, all things must be little, it cometh to pass that nothing is therefore more than little, and nothing falleth much more below the level of his greatness than other things which we are wont to think much of. If the divine observation and care is to extend to creatures at all, then it must be exercised upon insignificance and weakness, since, compared with himself, there is nothing else. If you desire proof that the Lord

considereth the lesser things, look at creation. The great and mighty God has displayed his greatness as much in the tiny objects which he has made as in the magnificent worlds which he has fashioned. Myriads of creatures disport themselves in a single drop of stagnant water, and yet in each one of these omnipotence is manifested. The bodies of those minute beings display in every part amazing skill and admirable design. Their very minuteness increases our wonder, and compels us to feel the mightiness of the divine Creator. For each of these infusorial creatures, so small as only to be observed beneath a strong microscope, God findeth fitting food, and puts life-force into each part of its organization, so that it can exist, and grow, and mature, and enjoy life, and transmit it to its successor. He seeth to everything that concerneth a gnat or a fly; and as surely as he watches over seraphim and cherubim he guardeth the worm of the earth and the minnow of the brook. God has created tiny things, not as a freak or an experiment, nor as the sport of his leisure, but in sober earnest he has evidently put forth as much of his mind in the formation of the minute as in the fashioning of the immense; and if he has done so, let us not question but that he will deal tenderly with the poor and needy among men, and he will despise none that seek unto him in sincerity of heart. He who takes care of gnats and flies will hear the prayer of humble hearts, and will not refuse to regard the ignorant and the obscure. Jesus, his Son, was meek and lowly in heart, and suffered the little children to come unto him, and therefore we who are least among men shall not be despised.

The same respect to the minor things is observable in providence. The providence of God doth not only concern wars between mighty empires, and the discussions of cabinets and royal councils, but it comprehends within its rule everything that transpires. The blooming of each one of the millions of daisies in the meadows is arranged by eternal purpose, and the croaking of a frog in the marsh, or the falling of a leaf from an oak in the forest is part of the plan of eternal wisdom. The migration of each swallow is as much arranged as the voyage of Columbus, and the breaking of a fowler's net is as surely ordained as the emancipation of a nation. God is in all things; not a sparrow lighteth to the ground without your Father, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered. A might which encompasses these little things, and condescends to make them a part of his eternal purpose, most evidently proves that the Lord cannot be suspected of despising any.

One telling argument to prove that the magnanimity of God despiseth none is found in the fact that he hath regarded man. David thought thus when he surveyed "the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he had ordained," for he exclaimed, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Man is neither the greatest, the strongest, nor the swiftest amongst animals. Lions outmatch him in force, horses in swiftness, eagles in power to soar, and fish in ability to dive. Leviathan far surpasses him in bulk, and behemoth exceeds him in the strength of his loins. Man is apparently a feeble creature, and more likely to be the prey of beasts than their destroyer. Look at him in his naked weakness, and what a defenceless, unprotected creature he appears, and yet he is monarch of the world. As David said: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of

thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet : all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field ; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." That God should consider man is an instance of that great-mindedness which does not look at bulk and strength, but abounds in condescension.

This is more clear, too, when you think of what sort of men God has most of all favoured. Who are his chosen? Remember that the most intimate love of God has seldom fallen to the lot of the great ones of this earth. "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called : but God hath full often chosen the poor of this world."

"When the Eternal bows the skies
To visit earthly things,
With scorn divine he turns his eyes
From towers of haughty kings.

"He bids his awful chariot roll
Far downward from the skies,
To visit every humble soul,
With pleasure in his eyes."

What saith Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians? "Things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." He despiseth not any, we are sure, for when he ordained fathers in his church, and set twelve leaders in the apostleship, he chose to this office neither philosophers, nor senators, nor kings, but lowly fishermen : and from that day to this it hath been his wont to do his mightiest actions for his people by those who have been least esteemed among the sons of men, for he is so mighty that he despiseth not any.

Brethren, you know, some of you, another sweet proof that he doth not despise any, for you can say in the language of David, in the twenty-second Psalm, "He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted ; neither hath he hid his face from him ; but when he cried unto him, he heard." You have some of you been in very deep waters through bodily pain, bereavement, poverty, or persecution, and you have found lovers and friends forsake you, for you have been but poor company for their merry-makings ; but God hath not forsaken you, he hath been very near unto you in the time of your distress, and thus hath he proved that he despiseth not any. To this man also hath he looked, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at his word.

I need not stay to prove this further, for all history declares that God hath no esteem for human greatness, that he hath no flattery for human excellence ; but that, on the contrary, he layeth the axe at the root of the tall and the green trees, and bringeth them down even to the ground ; but as for those that are lowly and despised, and appear to be withered, he hath pity upon them and blesses them, and so the word of his servant Ezekiel is fulfilled, "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish : I the Lord have spoken and have done it."

Now, brethren, the proof which I have given you that the Lord looketh upon little and lowly things shows the greatness of his soul. Our God is

not like the great ones among men. Kings and princes generally esteem those most who can do them or the state most service. God needeth nothing from any, and therefore neither esteems the great nor despises the little. He is delivered from all consideration of self, seeing that he is all in all. Those who can do the state no service are usually looked upon by their rulers as the last to be considered. Why should they have a voice? Who are they that their interests should be thought of? But seeing God requireth not to look to any for help, he is not led to look down with despite and contempt upon any. If you feel an undue esteem for some, it follows almost as a matter of course that you should have a want of consideration for others, but because God hath no need to ask favours of any of his creatures or in the slightest degree to care for their strength or wisdom, therefore he maketh not much of the great, and therefore on the other hand he does not make little of those who are of lowly rank. God hath power also to protect all interests, and this human rulers say that they cannot do. The great ones of the earth will often argue thus, "For the good of the general public a portion of the population must suffer. Great measures naturally involve distress here and there, and this is unavoidable. The law bears hard upon a few, but we cannot alter it: all regulations do so more or less." But God is so mighty that he has no need to perform a deed which involves injustice to one of the least of his creatures. Strict justice shall be dealt out to every individual as impartially as if he were the only creature God had ever made. The Lord knows how to consider every one separate individual of the human family as carefully as if there were no more than that one; for he is so great in might, and his thoughts are so deeply wise, that he looks to the interests of all. "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." Let us adore and bless him that this doctrine stands on so sure a basis: he is mighty in heart, and despiseth not any.

II. Now I come to THE PRACTICAL USES of this great truth.

And the first use of the truth is, *it should greatly encourage those who are tried.* You have not come, my dear friend, to quite so low a state as that of Job when he sat upon a dunghill and scraped his sores with a potsherd; but even if you were, you ought not to conclude that you are despised of the Lord. He never could despise one of those for whom Christ died. The Lord has not thought contemptuously of you and said, "Let him suffer! He is a nobody, it matters not what becomes of him." On the contrary, whatever your griefs are to-day they have been allotted to you by infinite wisdom, and superlative love. You are in the best condition that you could be in after all. Bad as it appears to you, God knows that your lot is rightly ordained. If it had been better for you, upon the whole, to have been rolling in wealth, you would have been; if it had been better for you never to know pang or pain, you would not have known them: but God's great purposes and plans, involving you and the rest of his people, render it the best thing that you should be tried, and therefore tried you are. If you could have all the facts of the case, and all the divine purposes spread before you, and if you could have as clear an understanding as God has, you would put yourself just where you are now, for your Father's dealings are right and good. He has not put you in the furnace because he despises you, but

because he values you. He bought you with the blood of Jesus, and therefore you may be sure he prizes you much.

Neither does the Lord think so little of you as to forget you in your pains. In all your grief Jesus has deep sympathy with you. In the watches of the night his eye sees your faintness and sleeplessness; when nurse and friend must from very weariness leave you, he is still with you, making your bed in your sickness. You must not say, "My God is so busy with heaven's glories, and with the management of the world's affairs, that he forgets me." Far from it. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Depend upon it, the great God is too mighty to despise one of his own children. He does not say, "It is only a work-girl pining away with consumption, she will not be missed." Nor does he say, "It is only a poor old woman, worn out, and suffering the natural pains of old age, it little matters what happens to her." He does not speak contemptuously, and say, "It is only a man of small brain, who will never do much, and is not worth caring about; let him sorrow and die, there will be only one grave more in the cemetery, and one mouth less to feed, and that is all." Oh, no, he "despiseth not any." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." He sees your tears and hears your groans, for he is in fellowship with the very least of his people. "In all their affliction he is afflicted, and the angel of his presence saves them." If any of you have come here this morning very much cast down because your trials are little known to others, and nobody sympathizes with you, do get a grasp of this grand fact, "He despiseth not any," and you will be much cheered. You are not made to suffer because of any indifference in God's heart towards you, but because he loves you. "As many as I love," saith he, "I rebuke and chasten." Take these rebukes and chastenings as tokens of his love, and when the rod falls more heavily than usual perceive it to be the rod of the covenant, which is held in a father's hand, and only comes upon his own beloved.

A second use of this great truth is one which I pray God to render effectual. *It should encourage every sinner who is seeking the face of God* to think that God is mighty, and despiseth not any. You, dear friend, feel now as if God might very well pass you by and suffer you to perish. You have begun to seek his face, but you could not blame him if he were to hide himself from you and leave you to perish, for you have such a keen sense of your unworthiness and insignificance. Be comforted by this,—God is too great to deny you his favour. What profit would he have in your blood? What benefit would it be to him that you should go down alive into the pit? His justice has been glorified sufficiently in the death of his Son Jesus, and those that believe in him shall therefore live. Beloved friend, it may be you say, "I am so ignorant, I know but little of the Lord." Will he despise you because of that? If he does so, woe unto us all, for we are all ignorant, and on that ground he might despise even the angels whom he charged with folly. In comparison with his omniscience all creatures are fools. Little as you know, he will teach you and instruct you, but he will not despise you. "Ah," say you, "but I have such slender faculties." Suppose you have, the greatest intellect that God has created must in comparison with him have little

enough of capacity, and therefore he would despise all that he has made. But it is not so. Does the Lord ask any faculty from us, except the faculty to receive his mercy and to lay hold upon his grace? Your very emptiness and sense of need constitute a faculty of receptiveness into which he will pour his grace. Be not discouraged, however low in the scale of intelligence you may place yourself. God is mighty in heart and despiseth not any.

Your heart is broken. Well, it is written, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Your graces are very weak, you cannot see clear marks of the divine Spirit about you. It is written, "He hath not despised the day of small things." Even sparks of grace he never tramples out, and although your grace is but as a smoking flax, which may have more of offence about it than of excellence, even that he doth not quench. The bruised reed, the grace which seems to be destroyed, and out of which no music can be brought, he doth not despise or break. Others may despise you, but the heavenly Father will not.

It is just possible that you say, "Oh, sir, I cannot think deep thoughts. I try to grasp the great doctrines, but they are beyond me." God is so mighty that he does not despise you for that, for he has sent you a gospel which requires no deep thought. The gospel of "believe and live" is on the level of any man's capacity who desireth to understand and believe. Christ Jesus has pitched the gospel note so low that our poor cracked bass voices may join in the tune. He hath made the steps of the Palace Beautiful so easy that little children may climb them. I bless him for that word, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not," for then I, who feel myself as a mere babe amidst the great mysteries of his kingdom, may come to him and be sure that he despiseth not any, and despiseth not me.

"Ah," but you say, "I fear that God will cast me away because I shall never be eminent for any great grace even if he saves me. My faith, I fear, will always be weak, my love will always be chill, my character will be imperfect." Well, beloved friend, then you will owe more to his love than others, and more to his patience and his grace, but in any case he will not despise you. Think you that the great God needs our great graces? It is true he is pleased with great faith, but he would be a great God if we had no faith at all. It is true he delights to see the heroism of his children, but not because he depends upon that or needeth it in the slightest degree. He getteth nothing out of us, our goodness extendeth not to him, therefore is he too mighty to despise us if we cannot render anything to him. Yet another replies, "I can understand God's saving a man who afterwards becomes an eminent minister or a gifted missionary; but if he were to save me he could not make much of me. What should I be if grace did its best with me? I could only be a humble unknown member of the church, drawing greatly upon his resources, but giving him a very small return." Well, beloved, the Lord is so mighty that he is willing to receive multitudes of such. Why should he not? If he did not receive them he would not be enriched by his refusal; if he does receive them he will not be impoverished by what he bestows upon them. Believe firmly in the generosity of God. I have known what it is to find shelter behind his magnanimity, when I have cried, "O that he would

look upon me in love! I am utterly unworthy and insignificant—will he take the trouble to spurn me? Will it be worth his while to refuse me his grace? Surely I am too unimportant for him to break his promise in order to reject me, and act contrary to his nature in order to cast me away, and both of these he would have to do if he rejected one poor, needy, penitent spirit which dares to trust in him through Jesus Christ.” O poor, discouraged one, believe in God’s great-heartedness. Throw yourself at the cross-foot, sinner, and say unto God, “By thy very greatness I will lay hold upon thee. Surely thou art too mighty to crush a worm like me, too mighty to refuse me now that I trust the blood and merit of thy Son. Display the greatness of thy might by saving me, even me, I beseech thee.” Do you not see how full of consolation is the doctrine of the text? May faith be given by the Holy Ghost to enable you to grasp it.

Lastly, this doctrine affords *an example to God’s people*. If our heavenly Father is mighty and despiseth not any, then it clearly follows that if we are imitators of God as dear children we must not despise any. I pray you never despise any of your brethren and sisters in Christ. Are they poorer than you? Do not despise them, but rather help them. If they are very, very poor, think what they have to bear, and do not add to their other sorrows the grief caused by your contempt. Deal gently and tenderly with them. If they are parts of your Lord’s body you should be glad to serve them, for so you wash his feet. You should feel it to be a blessing that there are poor saints to whom you can minister, because in so doing you are ministering to Christ. “The poor ye have always with you;” and they are needful, for if there were no poor saints we might begin crying “Lord Jesus, what can we do for thee? We wish we could show our love to thee, but now, seeing there are no poor saints, we do not know how to clothe thee, nor how to visit thee in thy sickness, and we shall miss the blessing thereby.” If poor saints abound around you, esteem them, because it is through them you will be able to be commended by your Lord when he will say to you, “I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink.”

Perhaps your poorer brethren are more honourable in God’s esteem than you are, and probably they love the Master better than you do. It is very possible that they show more of the power of godliness in their lives than you do in yours, and it may be when Christ will come in his glory he will put them in a higher seat than some who have houses and lands. Brethren, do not despise one another. If you see a brother with very little talent doing his best, never sneer at him; God may perhaps bless his one handful of corn more than he will your basketful if he sows in more faith than you do. Do not despise young beginners. What if they do not know as much as you do; you do not know too much, and you know but little to the purpose if you have no compassion upon the lambs of the flock. Never despise a brother because of the mistakes he makes in doctrine. If you can set him right, do so, but if the love of God is in him, do not cast him out for his blunders. Do not say, “I will never associate with that man.” In the family of grace there are some queer people; some of the Lord’s are such that, if he did not choose them in sovereignty, I am at a loss to see how else they were chosen. But then, if the Lord loves them, you should endeavour to do

the same. Never despise one of Christ's little ones, or evil will come of it.

Once more, *never despise any*. There is a text that some people are very pleased with—"Honour the king." Yes, by all manner of means: I trust we shall always be very loyal and honour the sovereign of the realm in which we dwell. But did you ever notice the precept which comes before it, which I recommend to those people who sneer at the poor? it runs thus—"Honour all men." This is just as much a duty as "Honour the king." "Honour all men." What, honour the lower classes? Yes, sir, "honour all men." Honour agricultural labourers? Yes, "all men." Honour paupers, negroes, crossing-sweepers? Yes, "honour all men." Respect the worker and the sufferer; respect the burden and the burden-bearer? Anything in the shape of a man or a woman deserves to be honoured, for man was made in the image of God. You are not to say of the fallen woman, "Away with her! The less said about her the better." Perhaps so, sister, but the more *done* the better. Nor are you to say of any man, "He is an incorrigible character; we cannot touch his case." No, that is not the way Jesus deals with men—he despiseth not any. Upon the worst of characters we ought to spend sevenfold love and patience, in the hope that we may rescue such depraved ones from the depths of sin.

If it comes, you know, to the matter of despising, and you and I begin despising our fellow-creatures, God may make short work of us by despising us all. He may just shut the door of mercy in our faces and say, "You think little enough of one another: you poor people are railing at the rich, and you rich people are sneering at the poor. By your own judgment you shall all be judged." The Lord knows, if he were to leave a woman to be judged by women, or even if he were to leave a man to be judged by men, a whole host of us would be lost. But instead of that he sets wide the door of grace, and bids the despised ones come and welcome. For Jesus' sake he looks in pity upon men, and has a kindness towards them. He sets before us an open door of mercy, and cries, "I have given my Son to die, and whosoever among you will but believe in him shall prove that I will not despise you, but will receive you to my heart, love you in time and love you in eternity, and give you to be sharers of the throne of my only begotten Son for ever and ever." Brethren, shake off your pride and love your fellow-man, for if ye love not your brother whom ye have seen how can you love God whom ye have not seen? If he is mighty and despiseth not any, then be sure that if you despise any it is because you are not the mighty body that you think you are; your contempt of others proves that you are a little-souled creature, weak, pitiful, pretentious. You may measure yourself by this—if you despise others you ought to be despised, but if on the contrary your tender heart of sympathy would lift even the beggar from the dunghill you are magnanimous, great-souled and like unto God. May the Holy Ghost make you more and more so. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job xxxvi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—194, 195, 689.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

VANITIES AND VERITIES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—2 Corinthians iv. 18.

THE apostle Paul was by no means a stoic. He had not conquered all human feeling, and rendered himself a stone man. On the contrary, he was exceedingly sensitive. You can see abundant evidence, not only in the Acts of the Apostles, but also in the tone of all his epistles, that he has a very tender spirit. He feels acutely any unkindness. If a friend forsakes him, he mourns it ; or if friends oblige him, there is genuine emotion in his gratitude. He is sensitive, too, to poverty, sensitive to shame ; sensitive to all those griefs which he has to bear for Christ's sake. He feels them : you can see that he does. He is not an invulnerable man in armour, he is a man of flesh and blood, whom the arrow pierces and pains. Yet how bravely he sticks to his work ; he faces every danger and never dreams of flinching. Never for a single moment does he seem to take into consideration what he may have personally to suffer for the testimony of Christ and the triumph of the gospel. He remembers the pangs when they are past ; he looks on the scars when they are healed, and he sometimes gives a long list of the perils and privations he has had to endure, thus showing that he was keenly sensitive ; but he never tries to shelter himself from any sort of suffering if it is necessary to accomplish his life-work. Thus he pressed steadily on through evil report and good report, through honour and through dishonour, enjoying the love of the churches at one time, and at another time smarting under a cruel suspicion of his apostleship even among his own converts ; now the hero of unbounded popularity when the people crowd to do him honour, and anon the victim of public hatred and frenzied riot when he is dragged out of the city to be stoned to death. “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me,” he could well say. He seemed as if God had thrown him forth from his hand, even

as he hurls a thunderbolt, and he stayed not until he reached the end towards which the power of God was urging him. He cried, "The love of Christ constraineth us." He reckoned himself, therefore, dead to all but Christ. Well may we be curious to know what supported so noble a man under his trials, and developed such a hero under such a succession of oppositions. What kept him so calm; what made him so self-possessed and intrepid?

How was it that when cast down he was not destroyed—that when troubled he was not distressed? What sustained him? He gives us the key to this fortitude by telling us that he counted his afflictions light because they were, in his estimation, but for a moment; and they were working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. He was calm and happy midst rage and tumult, violent prejudice, and adverse, and even disastrous, circumstances, because, in the language of the text, he looked not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen, reckoning that the things which are seen are not worth looking at, so transient are they, while the things unseen are of priceless worth, because they are eternal. That is our subject at this time: Firstly, *things not to be looked at*; and, secondly, *things to be looked at*.

The text wears the shape of a double paradox. Things that can be seen are, naturally, the things to be looked at. What should a man look at but what he can see? And yet the apostle tells us not to look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. How can things invisible be looked at? That again is a paradox. How can you look at what you cannot see? This is only one paradox of the Christian life, which is all paradox, and the riddle lies rather in the words than in the sense. We shall soon discover that there is no contradiction or incongruity, no difficulty whatever.

I. First, then, let us LOOK AT WHAT CAN BE SEEN, and ask, what are we to understand by this protest: "We look not at the things which are seen"? The word for "look" is used, I think, six times in the New Testament, and is translated in four or five different ways. I do not intend to keep to those translations, but to work them into the explanation of what is meant by not looking at the things which are seen.

It means, first, *lightly esteeming both present joy and present sorrows*, as if they were not worth looking at. The present is so soon to be over that Paul does not care to look at it. There is so little of it, and it lasts such a brief time, that he does not even deign to give it a glance, he looks not at it. Here he is persecuted, despised, forsaken. "It will not last long," saith he. "It is but a pin's prick; it will soon be over, and I shall be with the goodly fellowship above, and behold my Master's face." He will not look at it. He ignores it. Thus it behoves us to do if surrounded with trials, troubles, present sorrows: we should not think so much of them as to fix our attention, or rivet our gaze on them. Rather let us treat them with indifference and say, "It is really a very small matter whether I am in wealth or in poverty, in health or in sickness; whether I am enjoying comforts or whether I am robbed of them. The present will be so soon gone that I do not care to look at it. I am like a man who stays at an hostelry for a night whilst he is on a journey. Is the room uncomfortable? When the morning breaks it is of no use making a complaint, and

so he merely chronicles the fact, and hastens on. He says to himself, "Never mind, I am up and away directly; it is of no use fretting about trifles." If a person is going a long distance in a railway carriage, he may be a little particular as to where he shall sit to see the country, and as to which way he likes to ride; but if it is only a short stage—between, say, the Borough Road and the Elephant and Castle—he does not think about it. He does not care in whose company he may be, it is only for a few minutes; he is hardly in before he is out again, it is a matter not worth thinking about. That is how the apostle regarded it. He reckoned that his present joys and present sorrows were so soon to be over that they were to him a matter of indifference, not even worth casting his eye that way to see what they were. "Doth Jesus bid me go to Rome?" says the apostle. "Then I do not look to see whether I shall be housed in Nero's hall or caged in Nero's dungeon. It is for so short a while that if I can serve my Master better in the dungeon than I can in the palace, so let it be. My casual lot shall be my well-contented choice. It shall be a matter, if not of cool indifference, yet still of calm serenity, for it will be soon over, and gone into history. A whole eternity lies beyond, and therefore a short temporality dwindles into an insignificant trifle." What a blessed philosophy this is which teaches us not even to look at passing, transient troubles, but to fix our gaze on eternal triumphs.

He meant more than that, however. He meant that he had learned not to regard the things of the present as if they were at all real. He did not look upon them as substantial or enduring. Like as clouds when they float overhead assume divers shapes but change their form while we are gazing at them, so events as they seemed to be transpiring were to him no more than apparitions. When a man looks on a dissolving view, knowing that it is going to dissolve, he does not regard it as being other than an illusion. It is a shadow cast upon a sheet, there is nothing substantial in it. It may please his eye, but he will say, "The subject upon the sheet is not the real thing. The view before me is not the scene itself, and if I turn my eyes away from it, it will have melted away into nothingness in a little while, so for all its charms or its terrors I will not fret myself." You know how Paul explains his own words in another passage when he says, "Brethren, the time is short: It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." That is so with the earthly joy of the best of men. He should say to himself, "This is a dying joy; this will pass away; I look at it as a shadow." Is a child born into your house? Read across its brow the word "Mortal," and when it dies you will not be disappointed or be anything like so sad as if you dreamed that you were parent of an immortal: such a thought *must* be a dream, since *your* little one may be taken from you as well as the child of another. When you have riches do you say to yourself, "This is a solid treasure; this is golden gain"? Ah, then it will be your god, and if you lose it the loss will eat like a canker into your spirit. But if you say, "These are fleeting things; they take to themselves wings and fly away; I will not consider money to be

treasure, but only look upon it as a shadow and hold it as such—as a thing not to be reckoned with substances, because it is seen and temporal”—that is the way to do with every one of our joys. Do not look upon them as though they were substantial, for they are not. They are a part of this life-dream, this empty show: they are nothing more at their very best. Oh, how often do they prove to us, painfully, that they are unsubstantial! Look in the same way upon your circumstances. Say, “Well, I am in poverty, but this is not real poverty, because it is not lasting poverty. In a short time I shall be among the angels and walk the streets of gold, and be as bravely clad as any prince among them; therefore will I not fret and worry, since my poverty will soon be over.” Aught of loss or suffering that you are called upon to endure, always look upon it in the light of time, and see what a fleeting thing it is, and bear it bravely like a man—nay, like a Christian man—because you have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. These transient things are not worthy to be considered. Look upon them as if they were just nothing at all. So the apostle did.

Again, I find the word sometimes translated “mark.” “Brethren,” saith the apostle, “mark them that are unruly.” The word is the same as that which is here rendered “look.” Dear friends, we are not to mark the things which are seen as if they were worth notice. You know that little children, if you give them a new toy, or a new frock, clap their hands and otherwise express their delight. That is because they are children. Be not children in knowledge, but quit yourselves as men: and as to the things of this life, look on them as toys. Do not act towards them as children do, but as men. “Oh,” says the young man, “I have taken my degree at the university to-day.” How he exults. What high importance he attaches to it. He wishes to get the newspaper to see if it is recorded there. It is to him an event as great as anything in history. We peradventure are rather amused at his excitement, for we do not consider anything of this sort much worthy of marking down. Another man finds that he has made some considerable gain, and he, too, reckons as a red letter day the day in which he seized these accessions to his fortune. If thou art doing so thou art making sorrow for thyself, for as surely as joy becomes too sweet sorrow will become too bitter. If I care nothing whatever for man’s approbation, I reckon little of man’s disapprobation: one getteth to be brave in that way. It is not good to be much elated or much depressed by the joys and sorrows of life. If you are overjoyed, if you mark down certain matters as the very essence of happiness, and begin to exult and revel in the things which are seen, then, mark you, when the untoward things come to you and blight your hopes, you will find that you have rendered yourself too sensitive, and you will feel the smart far more keenly than you would have done if you had exercised wisdom enough to forbear revelling in the sweets. Look at the wasps and flies in summer. They will see placed for them by your kindness sweet liquor in which to catch them: sugar or honey is employed to hold their wings. The wise fly sips a little and away, but the unwise insect enjoys the sweet and wades in farther and farther till he clogs his wings, and he it is who will suffer when you come to destroy your prey. It is a blessed thing to be able to sip of this world, and no more, for to plunge into it is death. Avoid the sweets of this world when

they begin to tempt thee. Say of them, as Solomon did of wine—"Look not upon it when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright, for who hath woe, who hath sorrow, who hath contention, who hath babbling, who hath wounds without cause, who hath redness of eyes?" Surely the men who make this world to be their highest joy find at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth as an adder. They indulge their passions to the destruction of their souls. Do not, therefore, mark carnal joy as specially to be desired.

But are we never to have anything special to mark? Oh yes; carefully mark down the eternal things. Did the Lord appear to you? Mark that down. Did you win a soul to Christ? Mark that down. Did you have sweet answers to prayer? Mark that down. Those are things of special note, as I am quite sure Paul thought. Though he would not say much about the discomforts of the dungeon of the Prætorium, he marked down its consolations. When Onesimus came to hear him, he made a note of it. It did not matter to him whether he was assailed with stones or surrounded with applause. Whether he lodged in a palace or slept in a prison was to him no more than the incident, or say but the accident, of the hour; he made no account of such trivialities. He never marked those things down: the eternal was what he marked, but not the transient.

Another meaning is, *take heed*. You must put all the translations together to get the meaning. In the gospel according to Luke this word is translated, "Take heed." The apostle meant, no doubt, that he did not take heed of the things which were seen. He did not exercise care, thought, and anxiety about them; but his care, thought, and anxiety were about the things which are not seen. "After all these things," says Christ, "do the Gentiles seek." So they do. They are always seeking after the world; from early morning till late at night it is the world they are after. Well, let the Gentiles follow their pursuits; but the child of God should not, for our Lord says unto us, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed." He bids us cast our care upon him, and cease from all anxiety. "Seek ye," says he, "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." So the apostle Paul tells us not to care, not to worry or trouble ourselves about things which are seen, whether good or bad, prosperous or adverse—never suffering them to eat like a corrosive acid into our spirit. We are to spend all our heed upon our walk with God, our obedience to his command, our fulfilling his will, our spreading his kingdom, our getting ready for the coming of Christ, our being prepared for judgment, our being prepared to dwell eternally with God at his right hand. About these we ought to take heed. This is our business, but, alas, our thoughts naturally drift the other way. These temporalities are wont to absorb us. There are some who not only apologise for themselves, but justify their worldly-mindedness. Fitly, therefore, doth the Lord Jesus Christ, by the mouth of his apostle, recall our thoughts from grovelling themes, and bid us take heed of the eternal, and let the secular sit lightly on our minds.

Paul in the epistle to the Galatians uses the word in the sense of *considering*, "considering thyself lest thou also be tempted." We shall

dive still more deeply into the meaning if we understand how in certain conditions, the present, the transient, the things most palpable to the senses are properly left out of all consideration, and not taken into the reckoning. For instance, if the apostle knew that he should glorify God by preaching the gospel, what would it matter to him if friend or foe should say to him, "Paul, you will risk your life by attempting to do so"? Live or die, he would be bold to preach. He never took their caveat into his consideration. And if they had said, "If you state such and such a truth, or administer such and such a reproof in a certain church, you will be sure to lose their respect: you will lose caste among them," again he would have smiled. It would have had no more influence upon him than it would have upon a merchant should you say to him, "If you go into such a district you will have to encounter clouds of dust." He would reply "Why, if I can nett a thousand pounds, what do I care about dust or no dust." If it be my object to ascend a mountain, am I to be deterred by a few cobwebs across my path? What are tiny obstacles to a strong man? So Paul did not consider the things which are seen to be worth a thought, though there be puny folk who value nothing else. The cost to him seemed so little, that he would let it go into the scale or not, as men pleased. "I reckon that these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Are you not sometimes placed in this position? You know you ought to do right, but you fear that if you do so you will lose your situation. Well, now, if God's cause be uppermost in your estimation you will not consider your loss as the first matter. You will rather say, "I can lose anything sooner than lose peace of mind, and miss pleasing God." Or there is some duty which you know you ought to perform, and you are told, "Well, if you do that you will lose your old uncle's love. He will strike you out of his will. You must think about it." What is the use of thinking about it? It is only an earthly, transient thing; and what are these transient things, be they what they may, compared with the eternal weight of glory? O brothers, if men lived in the light of eternity, and judged their position accordingly, how differently would they act. But instead of so doing we begin weighing those trifles which we may have to endure for Christ's sake, and making much of them. This is playing the traitor to Christ, and forsaking him when we ought to be most firm. Shame upon us if we thus requite our Lord. Eternal contempt awaits such cowards. From this time forth may we never look upon the things which are seen as substantial, but put them down as vanity, and let the things which are not seen rise before us in all their supremacy of value.

Perhaps you may get a still clearer perception of the meaning of the text if I tell you its full interpretation. By "not looking at the things which are seen" we may understand *not making them our scope*. That is the nearest English word I can find to interpret the Greek. Let not these visible objects be the scope of your life; for, alas, there are many whose whole scope of life is that they may prosper in this world. The next world may go as it will; their scope ends here. To win the esteem of God seems a trifle to them. That they may live at ease, enjoy the comforts, and, if possible, the luxuries of this life, is their sole aim and object.

As for the eternal things of heaven they seem dim and unsubstantial. Now, it must not be so with us. We should say, "The things eternal I pursue. I am no more a citizen of this world, but a pilgrim bound for the celestial city. When I passed through Vanity Fair, they asked me to buy this and that, and I said, 'I buy the truth.' I must go through the Enchanted Ground, but I will not sleep there, for this is not my rest. Whatever I see which is enchanting to others shall have no power over me, for the scope of my soul's desire and life-work is eternity." Would God we all had invisible joys for our object.

To sum up the whole, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, look not at the things which are seen. Do not look upon your comforts as if they were enduring. Do not dote upon them. Do not think of them as if you had them otherwise than on loan, or as if you had any right to them. Be thankful to God for them; but, because they will so soon pass away, do not set much store by them. Build not your nest on any of these trees, for they are all marked for the axe, and ere long they will all come down. Say not of any mortal man, or woman, or dear child, or worldly possession, or knowledge, or pursuit, or honour, "This is much to me." Let it be little to you. Put the gifts of God far down in the scale compared with himself. Try, when you have your comforts, to find God in all; and, when you lose your comforts, then just change the words, and try to find all in God; for, remember, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall man live."

You have not to live on the creature comfort: you are bound to live on the living word of the living God, and you will never be fully happy until you do this. A man who goes to a town and chooses a house that is dilapidated—the foundations gone and the beams decayed—may say, "This is a very comfortable house." But *you* would not think so highly of its charms. "Nay," you would be ready to say, "I cannot be comfortable in it. The rich hangings and costly furniture do not hide the serious defects; it may come down at any time about the heads of the sleepers. This is not a house for me." You know this is the case in daily life and common experience. Well, it is just similar with regard to the things eternal. Say therefore to yourself, "I must repose my soul upon that which is true, real, well-founded, and imperishable: earthly things are too transient to afford me any solace or security. I dare not set my soul upon them. I cannot drink water out of these broken cisterns, I must go to the fountain whence all satisfying, trustworthy supplies flow."

You must do the same with regard to your sorrows: although it looks rather hard, yet it is the wiser way to take them cheerfully, rather than to exaggerate their weight by murmuring at them. If a man has grace to live above his joys, that same grace will enable him to live above his sorrows. As I said just now, when earthly joys enchant you too much, then should earthly sorrows overtake you they will make you sorely despond. Your wisdom is to live above them both, above the glee of prosperity and the gloom of adversity. Dear brother, what ails you? have you lost a child? Lost! Why, you will be where that dear one is within so incredibly short a time, that you need not worry and fret. Coming down from such a domestic grief as that to a commercial

anxiety : you have had a sad loss in the City, have you ? Some of your comforts will be curtailed. But if you get nearer to the heart of your Lord, and love him better, and walk in the light of his countenance more than you did, you will never know you had a loss. You will be so much richer in the fine gold of his comfort, that you will scarcely miss the silver of this poor world.

And so, too, if you lose credit, or are discountenanced by old friends, or are deprived of aught which men are wont to make great account of here below ; if you do but remember that it was only a bubble, and it has burst, you will not be broken-hearted. Say, "It never was more than a bubble, and I ought to have known that it would soon be gone. The comfort I had was never anything but a temporary loan, and I ought to have remembered that it was borrowed." If you get into that mind you will live above the cares of this life. May God help you so to do.

II. Now for a few minutes let us address ourselves to the second point—LOOKING AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN. How can we do that?

Well, first, *realize them by faith*. We believe in the 'resurrection of the dead, and in the judgment, and in life everlasting, according to the teaching of the word of God. Try to look at these things—to look at them as present facts. Some will never do so. They will tell you that they could not see them if they tried ; but that is just what we, who have been taught of God so to look at the things which are not seen, can palpably discern. Oh, to look beyond death to "the home over there," beyond the swelling flood where souls that were loved of God from before the foundation of the world are safe with Jesus. I invite you to do so, especially if you have some dear ones there. Do you see them ? Do you hear their music ? Do you behold their joys ? Are you going to be troubled about them any longer after having realized their certain happiness ? By-and-by there cometh the resurrection, and the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. The very body over which you wept because it was to be given to the worm shall rise in matchless beauty in the likeness of its Lord. Will you not wipe your eyes dry now and submit to the divine will, for surely the hope of the blessed resurrection makes amends for the loss by death ? Then there is to come the judgment, and you and I will be there. A soldier, some time ago, was in the valley of Jehoshaphat, where, according to tradition, the feet of the Messiah will rest in the day of judgment, and he sat on a stone and said, "And shall we all be present ? I will sit here in that day." And there, absorbed with the thought, he looked up to the sky, and so distinctly did he realize the majestic vision of the day of judgment, that he fell to the ground in amazement, oblivious of everything that was transpiring around him. Ah, if all of us were living in the light of the day of the Lord, what trifles these ebbs and flows, these ups and downs of passing circumstances would seem ! How lightly we should bear sorrow, and how little we should reckon of earthly fortunes and misfortunes if we could actually forecast the tremendous day when with angels for witnesses and Christ for our judge we shall have to stand and be judged according to the things done in the body. Realize heaven, brothers and sisters—the heaven of the perfected manhood after the resurrection—the heaven where we shall see the Beloved's face, and day and night extol him for ever. Oh, what is

it to be poor? What is it to be sick? What would it be to go through a thousand deaths if we may but at last behold his glory, world without end? And think of hell, ye that forget God and revel in vanities; as your trembling spirit best may, think what it must be to be driven from his presence—to hear him say, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire in hell.” Ah! gilded world, how thou dost lose thy lustre when once I see the lurid glare of Tophet! O painted harlot, how I see thy haggard ugliness, when I hear the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth of those who chose the broad road and let the Lord the Saviour go! How I despise thee! As the vision opens before the eyes of faith what zeal it kindles in my breast! Would to God I could induce some careless person here, who nevertheless does believe the Scriptures, to sit down, if it were but for one half-hour and try, believingly, to picture these things to his mind’s eye. This sacred volume is full of pictures; pictures of things that shall shortly come to pass. Oh that ye had the discernment to see them, not as weird fancies, but as veritable facts; the true sayings of God. The real thing is what you do not see to be real. The fiction is that which you account a solid fact. We are going down each one of us to the grave, but God liveth for ever and ever. As for that body of yours in which you are sitting in this house, it is not a substance which shall abide, but it is a shadow which shall dissolve, mouldering into dust, and exhaling into water. Yet there lives within you what you cannot see—the real and true self; and that true self of yours will pass into another state, and through it into yet another, which shall be everlasting. And, oh, may God grant that your lot may not be everlasting sorrow, but endless joy. In either case the things which are not seen are eternal. Gird up your loins and look at them like a man who will have ere long to dispel the illusions of sense and confront the verities of eternity, whether he will or no.

The Christian learns to *look on these things with the eye of delight*. Is it not to you, my dear brother in Christ, a delight to see God? I should not like to go to any place where I could not see my God. Yet he is not seen. Is it not a delicious thing to look forward to the heaven that is above—to the city of the blest? When the Lord indulges our faith with a view of that eternal joy—and some of us have known what it is—it has been too much for our weak capacity. We can laugh in our sleep when we dream of heaven, and we can sit down in the midst of pain and sorrow and feel as if we could not feel more joy than we possess, because our souls have looked on the pinnacles of our Father’s palace, and seen the gleaming radiance of the twelve bejewelled foundations of the eternal city where there is a house and a crown and a harp for every believer among us. The poor girl who goes home from this joyous place of worship to her own little cheerless room would feel miserable indeed if she looked at the shady side of her condition; but she says, “My Lord is in this room,” and the place glows as if it were made of slabs of gold. She settles down and begins to think of the heaven that is hers, and she sees herself to be a king’s daughter, a true princess, for she possesses in the glory-land a crown that no head can wear but hers, and there is a mansion provided for her which none can tenant but herself; happy, therefore, she well may be. O beloved friends, learn to look at these things with intense

delight, because they are ours in reversion now, and are soon to be ours in possession.

On the other hand, if you are not converted, I would urge you to look upon the eternal future—for it is all eternal—with an intense dread, for without Christ what is there for you among the things which are not seen, and are eternal, but that which will make you wring your hands for poignant grief and gnash your teeth for bitter self-reproach if you are resolved to live and to die as you now are? You see not yet the future state of woe, but like all the unseen things it is eternal. There can be no termination to the misery of an immortal soul when once banished from God. I see no “larger hope” revealed in Scripture. Let my philosophical brethren conjecture what they will, where God speaks not I am silent: but I do see the dread forebodings of a death that never dies and a fire that is never quenched. I would have every man who will not have Christ, or who dilly-dallies with salvation and runs risks with his soul, to look at what he risks. Face your future, O you who choose your own destruction! That was a solemn morning’s work for Abraham when he went to the place where he was wont to meet with God, and he looked towards Sodom, and he saw the smoke thereof going up as the smoke of a furnace. O Christians, you do well sometimes to look that way. Such a contemplation is not pleasant to flesh and blood. No, but it will do you good and make you feel fervent emotions of gratitude for your own redemption, and intense desires for the salvation of others. But come thou here, sinner! Come thou here! I must have thee here. Look, dost thou see it? Dost thou see it—the smoke of the flame which burneth for ever and ever? That flame is for thy burning if thou repent not. Dost thou see it as it reddens the heavens? That fire burns for thee if thou believest not in the Lord Jesus Christ. Wilt thou not look? If thou wilt not, thou wilt have to feel it. Thou canst not mitigate those woes by refusing to believe in their existence. It is the silly trick of the ostrich, so they say, when the hunter pursues it, to burrow its head in the sand and fancy itself safe; and this is what you are doing, with more than equal folly. I would fain recall you to reason. Look at the things which are not seen, for they are eternal. I met with a remark the other day which struck me forcibly,—If a man had no worse pain than the toothache, if he knew that it would last for ever, he would desire to die that he might escape from it. When we have to endure any acute pain for a little while we begin to cry out for relief, and find it hard to be quiet, but were any pang to last eternally, the horror of such an expectation would even now be overwhelming! By the dread thought of eternity I implore you see to it, that your salvation is secured at once. Escape for thy life, my friend, and look not behind thee, for unless thou escape in time thy fate will be sealed for ever and ever. Those things which are not seen are eternal, and hell is one of them. Except thou escape now by faith in Jesus Christ thou never wilt escape. There is no reprieve nor respite in the world to come; pardon therefore should be sought at once.

By looking into the things which are not seen, Paul doubtless meant that *he looked to them with hope*. To his view the harvest was ripe, and he was eager to reap it. I invite all believers to be looking with *ardent hope* for the things that are eternal. Long for the bright ap-

pearing of the Lord. Long for your translation unto the city of glory. Expect it : watch for it. It is on the way. You may be much nearer than you think. You may be in heaven before next year ; indeed, you may be there before to-morrow morning. Light is fading from the earth. Dear friend, look towards heaven. Look towards eternal things. Make it a point to look unto thy future home. Should there be any young man here who is not twenty-one, and he knows that when he comes of age he is to be squire of a village, own a park, and enjoy a rich heritage, I will be bound to say he has often forestalled the time because he is sure of his title. If any one of you had a legacy left him of a large estate, he would be off this week to have a look at it. One likes to look at one's own : Christian, be sure to survey thine own possession in the skies. Read much the book of God, which tells thee of thy future inheritance. Say to thyself, "This is all mine. Why should not I begin to enjoy it? Did not the Israelites fetch bunches of the grapes of Eshcol before they entered Canaan? And why should not I?" I hope you will full often enjoy foretastes of bliss, till you can sing with John Berridge,—

"Too long, alas, I vainly sought
For happiness below,
But earthly comforts, dearly bought,
No solid good bestow.

"At length, through Jesu's grace, I found,
The good and promised land
Where milk and honey much abound
And grapes in clusters stand.

"My soul has tasted of the grapes,
And now it longs to go
Where my dear Lord his vineyard keeps,
And all the clusters grow.

"Upon the true and living vine
My famish'd soul would feast,
And banquet on the fruit divine,
An everlasting guest."

What a sanctifying influence such anticipations would have upon you ! "Every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." Pursue eternal things with concentrated mind. You must look right on to the end of the race for the prize. The runner does not cast a glance to the right or to the left, or to the flowers which bespangle the pathway, but he keeps his eye on the prize, and that helps him to run. He stretches every nerve to reach the end, and win the prize. Brothers and sisters, make eternal things the scope of your life at all times. This I have told you is the literal sense of the original Greek. Make them that for which you plot and plan ; that for which you think and consider ; that for which you live and act : throw your whole being into eternal things. Are we, therefore, to neglect business, you may ask? God forbid! Serve God in business. To leave business, or to do business as if it were not a part of your religion, would be a departure from your Master's will, and not a fulfilment of it. Sanctify your commonest action to the glory of God. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of

God." Have an eye always to eternity. Keep your thoughts upon that. Eat and drink as for eternity, remembering that what you eat and drink perisheth, and he that eats will perish too. It is "earth to earth" whenever we eat, therefore let us not make gods of our bellies. When thou enjoyest any earthly thing, do it as in the light of eternity, and say, "I am plucking a flower that must fade. This is not a diamond that will remain with me, always glistening; it is only a bright daisy; it looks very pretty at the moment, but it will soon fade. The children gather it, but soon let it fall, and so do I. Put not thy soul into that which is sensual at thy peril. See that thou pursuest with all thy might things spiritual. As for things transient, commit them to God's providence. Do thy best to honour God in the use of this world's currency, but make it not thy wealth. Look at Jonah sitting under his gourd which screened him from the scorching sun with its broad leaves. Think of Jonah as he said to himself, "How happy I am under this arbour. How cool it makes me." He was content and comfortable, but God prepared a worm. The worm destroyed the wretched gourd. Though it seemed so beautiful before, it soon became only fit to be pulled down and cast upon the dunghill. It may soon be the same with your earthly comforts. If you make your gourd your God, it will do you no good. Gourds are well enough, but they are not good when you put them in the place of eternal comforts.

I finish with this. Treat the things present as if they were not, and live thou like an heir of heaven's invisible but substantial joys. Higher and better things are in store for thee. God bless thee by his blessed Spirit with blessed foretastes of the blessed hereafter. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians iv.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom."—
Isaiah xl. 11.

MINISTERS all over England have been specially requested to assist in exciting a spirit of prayer in connection with Sabbath Schools to-day, and I feel that the training of the young is so important a part of Church work that it would be almost sinful to decline the seasonable request of the Sunday School Union. Therefore have I selected this subject this morning in the hope that God the Holy Spirit may bless it, not only to those who are teachers, but to those who ought to be, and afterwards to those of us who may be otherwise occupied in the Master's vineyard, that we also may be led more earnestly to pray for our brothers and sisters who are watching over the lambs of the flock.

The words of our text are spoken of One who is in the tenth verse called "The Lord God with strong hand," and of whom we are asked, in verse 12, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" It is a wonderful proof of the tenderness of God that very generally when he is spoken of by his glorious titles, and is described in the infinity of his power, we are before long assured of his great gentleness by having some special deed of kindness ascribed to him. He is the Lord God with strong hand and ruling arm, but he carrieth the lambs in his bosom: he bringeth out the starry host by number, he calleth them all by names in the greatness of his might, and yet he "doth gently lead those that are with young." How condescending it is on the part of the great Lord that he should come to shepherdize men! How marvellous that it should be said of the Almighty God, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd"—shall act the shepherd towards his chosen among the sons of men: guiding, feeding, protecting, nourishing, and healing them. It is Jehovah Jesus, who, though he accounted it

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not robbery to be equal with God, yet came down to earth that he might be the shepherd of men. A shepherd bears among his flock in wonderful conjunction the offices of ruler and of servant. He rules and guides and controls his flock, but at the same time he waits upon them as the servant of all. Behold in the Lord Jesus you see one who was justly recognized by his disciples as their Master and Lord, and yet, as the servant of servants, he washed the feet of his disciples. He came as God to be a Prince and a Saviour, but he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant. He bowed himself to save his people, to help their infirmities, to sympathize with their sorrows, and even to suffer for their sins. Behold what manner of love the great Shepherd of the sheep has manifested towards us.

It is notable that to accomplish this work the Lord is represented as coming with strength.—“Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him.” From which I gather that the work of saving men is one which requires the putting forth of strength, even when he who undertakes it is divine. He is mighty to save, for it requires might to save a soul. If you and I under God are called to attempt the work of soul saving, we must certainly borrow divine strength if we are to succeed, for what power to save can dwell in an arm of flesh? Nor must we ever treat the work of caring for the souls of men with indifference, nor go about it with carelessness. It is not a secondary work to be pursued at leisure as a species of amusement: it filled the Saviour’s heart and hands, so that the zeal of it ate him up; and unless you have the same power resting upon you which also dwelt in him, and something of the same fervour, you will never be able to perform it aright. O servant of the living God, see that your loins be girt with omnipotence for such a task as this, for to save the soul of the smallest child in the Sabbath school will need the same power that raised Christ from the dead.

The Lord would also have you feel that soul-winning can only be done in earnest, it requires energy and fervency. We must exercise every faculty, use all our intellect, arouse all our affection, and continue labouring with unbounded perseverance, if by any means we may save some. When I behold the Lord coming forth to save, even the Lord who made the heavens and the earth, I know what a work it must be; and when I see even him coming with a strong hand, making his arm to rule for him, I comprehend that it is no child’s-play to be a soul-winner. If God himself putteth on strength, then you and I must ask for power beyond our own, that we may be useful in this heavenly service.

Beautifully does our text set forth, not only the great power exerted by our Lord Jesus, but also his tender love, for not only does he come forth to care for men as his sheep, but he undertakes work among the lambs, among the feeblest, the smallest, the youngest. No part of his work is beneath him: he does all the work of a good shepherd. It is supposed by some that it needs greater genius and ability to care for the sheep than for the lambs; I have even known preachers speak of bringing their minds down to the comprehension of children: they know little of the matter, for to preach a child’s sermon or write a really good child’s book is a very difficult task, and requires the highest ability. Jesus evidently thinks not lightly of the little ones, nor of the service which they require. His shoulders may suffice for lost sheep, but his bosom is

reserved for the lambs; they need and shall have our Lord's best. With divine sweetness and tenderness the Redeemer carries the lambs in his fond embrace, and lends both his heart and his arm to cherish and protect them.

We have before us in the text a lovely outline portrait of the Good Shepherd. Let us look at the picture and notice its main beauties, and when we have done so sufficiently let us see therein an example for the church, and a model for the teacher of the young.

I. We have to examine A PORTRAIT OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD. Let us study it with care. "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom." What see I in this picture? First I see the Lord of angels *condescending to personal labour*. Jesus Christ himself gathers with his own arm and carries in his own bosom the lambs of his flock. He doth not commit this work to an angel, nor does he even leave it to his ministers; but he himself, by his Spirit, still undertakes it. He cared for the lambs while he was here below. He suffered the little children to come unto him, and he took them in his arms and blessed them. He spoke very plainly, so that the young could understand his words, for he cared for their souls. We have frequent indications that he was often followed by a great company of young people; and we know that they were ready to give him their hosannas with eager enthusiasm. After he had risen from the dead he did not forget the young of the flock, for he said to Peter, "Feed my lambs." He was the holy child Jesus himself all his days, and he was a dear lover of the little ones, the true "children's friend." The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, for the Lord had anointed him to preach glad tidings to the meek, and the poor, who are as lambs in the flock. He condescended to look after the feeble and weak of the flock himself, toiling many a weary mile and pleading through many a chilly night on their behalf. Now, though he reigns in heaven, his divine Spirit looks after the young converts, and causes them to grow up in his fear. Many are the Timothies taught from their youth to know the Scriptures whom his grace meets with and saves, and when they are saved, being still his lambs, he watches over them, trains them, instructs them, confirms their faith, guides them in his way, and preserves them to the end. All our mercies, as believers, we owe to our Lord's personal service, "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Not by proxy did he save either his sheep or his lambs, he did not stand and bid others do it and himself merely give the command, but he himself here below spent thirty years of personal service among the sons of men. At this moment he is personally pleading for his own, and personally ruling providence on behalf of his little ones. He gathers and he carries still. And if, dear brothers and sisters, we are to be at all like Jesus we must not merely write tracts about how Sunday School work is to be done, nor stand on an eminence like a commander-in-chief and give orders, but we must each one personally bend our back and stoop to the lambs, we must put out the strength of our own arm to gather them, and then carry the blessed load of infirmity in our own bosom. We must render personal service if we are to be like our Lord, who gave himself for us. This first line in the portrait is well drawn, and adds much to its manly beauty; he condescended to personal labour.

The second noteworthy line in the portrait seems to me to be that Jesus was *earnest to save*, and earnest to save little ones. The text doth not merely say that he carries the lambs in his bosom, but that he gathers them. It were great love that he should carry those who come; it is greater love that he gathers those who do not come. Constraining grace goeth out into the midst of the world to fetch in the wandering sheep and lambs; and therein the greatest love is revealed, even the love which puts forth its strength while yet we go astray. The Good Shepherd sees that even children's hearts are far off from him, and will remain so unless his effectual grace shall go forth to reclaim them from the error of their natural estate; and, glory be to his love, he still doth fetch this one, and that one, in early days to himself; not waiting till they come, but going after them, even as the parable of the good Shepherd sets forth, for there the shepherd leaves the ninety and nine in the wilderness and goes after that which is gone astray until he finds it. Brothers and sisters, if we are to be like Christ—and I hold the picture up that we may endeavour to copy it—we must not only rejoice when children are saved, and encourage them when we see signs of grace, but we must go after the little tenants of the street, the little disorderly members of our class, the young rebels of our family, and “compel them to come in.” It must be the aim of our teaching that children, as children, should become children of the living God. For this we should pray, for this we should seek to be anointed of the Holy Ghost, that we may bring in these lambs from the dark mountains to the green pastures. Whereas they are wayward, inattentive, difficult to rule, forgetful, and inapt in spiritual things, we must with great patience gather them, win their hearts, impress their minds, and introduce them by divine grace into the fold of love. Look at the picture before you, and you can see that your Lord is earnest to save. His face, his hands, his feet, his side all prove what an eager Saviour he is. He does not tarry at home till wanderers of their own free will seek his face, but he goeth forth to seek the lambs which lie about neglected in these great wilderness cities; he finds them in the fields of ignorance, and under the hedges of vice, pining and perishing for lack of knowledge, and he gathers them with his arm.

Thirdly, a very superficial glance will show us that our Lord is *willing to receive*. If he be so eager to gather those who do not come, depend upon it he is willing to receive all who do seek him. There is never a heart that yearns after Christ, though it be the heart of a little child, but Jesus Christ delights to note those early desires. There is little knowledge as yet in the child's heart about the Lord, and little knowledge as yet of the evil of sin, but Jesus does not expect much from tender youth. Only a feeble ray of light has gleamed into the soul, only a gentle breath of the divine wind has turned the little soul towards Christ, but our Lord perceives it, and delights therein. It were well if we could copy this trait in our Lord's character. I am afraid we are not very quick to notice the first impressions of boys and girls, or else we harshly judge that such impressions are writ in water, and having been frequently disappointed we have grown incredulous of children's convictions and children's faith. But it should not be so, for if our Lord gathers the lambs, it is clear that he is willing enough to receive

those lambs when they come; and if you are to be like your Master I would exhort each of you to receive with gladness even the least among your scholars when they come to tell you of their newborn faith in Christ. Do not quench the sparks, but fan them to a flame; never crush the bruised reeds, nor throw them away as useless, for with a little care they may be so bound up that your Lord may get music out of them to his eternal praise. Despise not the day of small things. Look not for ripe graces and mature judgment in the early spring of youth, but rejoice in the buds and blossoms. Receive the lambs as lambs, though they are the weakest and most troublesome of the flock. See what your Lord does. The loving tenderness of Christ, and his willingness to receive those who seek him early, should make our hearts willing to believe in childish piety, quick to perceive it, and ready to rejoice in it. Wisely may we receive those whom Jesus receives; if they are capable of coming to him and lying in his bosom they will do no dishonour to the bosom of the church.

In this portrait I see a fourth beautiful feature, namely, that he is *careful to protect* the feeble lambs. Gathering graciously and receiving kindly, he next guards securely. To this end the Shepherd places the sickly lamb in his flowing garment, close to his bosom, and carries it there. He will not let it try to walk, for it is as yet too weak; he will not even put it in the fold and leave it with the old sheep, but he must himself, while it is in a critical state, carry it where it shall be at its ease, and secure from trial or toil. Here in his bosom it will not be pinched by the frost, his heart will keep it warm; here it will not die of weakness, his own life will flow into it and fill its little struggling heart with vitality; here the wolf cannot touch it, for unless the wolf could rend the shepherd, it certainly could not destroy the beloved burden which he carried on his heart. How carefully doth Christ watch over the lambs. He is lovingly watchful over the entire flock, for not one under his care shall perish, but towards these his tenderness is more manifest, for they need it more. It is with him even as with a mother who is more anxious concerning her little babe or her sick child than concerning the strong of the family. Where the need is greatest the love is most fervent. Christ carrieth the lambs in his bosom because the greatest need requires the most luxurious resting place and the most calm repose. Beloved friends, we must be very careful to protect young Christians if we would see them become strong in Christ. We should anxiously endeavour to keep them out of temptation, and since they must be tempted more or less, we should endeavour to strengthen them to endure the various forms in which it assails the young. Let us lead them away from habits which debase and amusements which degrade. Let us try to keep from them many of those sinful doubts which have perplexed ourselves, and those heresies which have been a snare to others: above all, let us, by a pious example, endeavour to preserve them from the corruption that is in the world through lust, carrying them in our bosoms to the throne of grace, to the house of God, and to everything which is pure, and holy and acceptable to God. As Mr. Greatheart is described by Bunyan as conveying the women and children to the celestial city and fighting the giants for them, even so should we. We must in the name of the Lord watch for their souls as

those that must give account, keeping guard from week to week lest our hope should be disappointed. Thus shall we be like the Good Shepherd, who is ever careful to protect his own.

"Shepherd of the chosen number,
They are safe whom thou dost keep;
Other shepherds faint and alumber,
And forget to watch the sheep;
Watchful Shepherd!
Thou dost wake while others sleep."

But our Lord's act means more than that, for he might have put the lambs on his shoulders if mere safety were all that he designed. We see by the picture before us that he is *tender to cherish* the little ones. It is said that he carries them: this is mercy; but this is not all, for he carries them in his bosom, this is tender mercy. To carry is kindness, but to carry in the bosom is loving-kindness. The shoulders are for power, and the back for force, but the bosom is the seat of love. Jesus would warm, cheer, comfort, and make them happy. The Lord wishes all his people to be happy: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." It is a worthy object to try and make any Christian happy, but especially a young believer, whose weakness needs great gentleness. To clothe religion with gloom is to slander the name of Christ. We should always be most eager to prevent young believers from imagining that to follow Christ is to walk in darkness, for, indeed, it is not so. Hath he not himself said, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness"? Did not the wise man say concerning wisdom, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace"? The good Shepherd looks to the comfort, peace, and enjoyment of his lambs, and he carries them where they will be most happy. If you are to be like your Master you will try to take away from young believers' hearts all temptation to despondency; you will set before them the richness and freeness of the gospel, the "exceeding great and precious promises," the oath and covenant, and the stability of the engagements of God; yea, you will try to let them see the preciousness of Christ, and tell them how exceeding faithful and true you have found him to be in your own experience. All this will help them to ride at ease on the breast of Jesus' love, if the Holy Ghost graciously assists your endeavours. Do not sow mistrust in their hopeful nature, nor instruct them to be as unbelieving as their fathers. Do not sternly judge and condemn them. Cruelty to children is the worst of cruelty, and unkind and harsh judgments upon inexperienced believers are barbarous and unworthy of the Christian name. Endeavour to comfort and not to distress, to cheer and not to censure, to gladden and not to discourage the babes in grace, for they are dear to the heart of Christ.

Once more, dear friends, you see in the text that Christ, the good Shepherd, is *loving in his estimate* of the lambs. Men carry in their bosoms their gems, their jewels, and so doth Christ carry the lambs of the flock, regarding them as his peculiar treasure. He knows that in themselves they are nothing worth, but then he puts an estimate upon them according to his own relationship to them. He prizes them because his Father gave them to him of old to be his portion. The little

child that believeth in Christ was given to Christ before the foundations of the world : therefore doth he look upon it as a choice treasure, and it is exceeding dear in his eyes. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me," saith he. He knows, too, what the child cost him, for to redeem a little child from going down into the pit he must needs bear the penalty due to justice, and suffer even unto death. He sees the purchase of his agonies in every youthful believer. For him the precious blood flowed from the Redeemer's own heart, and bought the child to be his own redeemed for ever. He recollects, moreover, what that child will come to if he do not save it by carrying it in his bosom. It has sinned, it has knowingly and wilfully sinned, and therefore it lies under the curse of the law, and Jesus mourns to see a soul in that condition, obnoxious to the wrath of God. A soul is a precious thing to Christ, for he believes in its immortality. We know he does, for he speaks of a place "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched," and he it was that told us that the wicked will be driven away into "everlasting punishment." Hence he values souls at a rate unknown to those who dream that men are mere animals, and will one day cease to exist. If they are to pass away and be no more, like things of the dust and of the mist, why should he die for them at all? Why should he care to gather them? But because no diamond can ever equal in value the soul even of a beggar's child, therefore does Christ carry his little ones in his bosom as exceeding precious to him.

And he knows, too, what may come of that child if he saveth it, for the possibilities of blessing within one little saved child who shall estimate but the Lord who knoweth all things? I read the other day a pleasing anecdote of what one lamb may come to. A ewe brought forth three lambs, and the brutal shepherd threw the third into the hedge that there might be the more milk for the other two. A poor woman passing by begged for the thrown away lamb, employed her utmost care in nursing it by means of a sucking bottle, and reared it till it could eat grass for itself. She turned it upon the common, and in due course it produced her twins : by care she at length raised a whole flock of sheep from the single ewe, and in process of time she became a woman of considerable estate. See what one poor half-dead lamb may yet produce. Who knows what one poor trembling soul may yet bring forth? Jesus knows that perhaps a boy may be here who will be the spiritual father of scores and hundreds of thousands ere he dies. There may be in the congregation of to-day a Chrysostom or an Augustine. Right among us may sit a little Whitefield, or a young Luther, or some other of honourable character who shall lead many to Christ. There was a dreadful snow-storm one Sabbath morning when Dr. Tyng, of New York, set out to preach, and when he reached the church there was only one poor little girl there. Most preachers would have gone home when one child made up the whole of the congregation ; but Dr. Tyng went through the service as earnestly as if the pews had been crowded. He preached to the little girl, and God gave him that girl's soul, and never was he better repaid. To his knowledge she had been the means of bringing some twenty-five to the Lord Jesus, and among them was one of his own sons. The greatest orator, the most spiritual teacher, the most useful evangelist may not dare to despise one of Christ's little ones. It were worth while

for all the ministers in England to journey round the world to save the soul of a single shoeblack or of one girl in the workhouse. Value the little ones by their possibilities, and you will reckon one lamb to be an untold treasure, worthy to be preserved in the casket of your loving care. Luther's schoolmaster always used to take off his hat to his boys when he entered the schoolroom, because, he said, he did not know what they might become, and had he known that Martin Luther had been there he could not have done better than he did. Jesus Christ knows what he can make of little children in heaven, and so he carries them in his bosom because they shall be for ever near the Father's throne to behold his face. He has learned to estimate them at their eternal value; a value which his grace has put upon them, and which he never forgets.

Now, if there were time to take my text and handle it in another shape I should divide my subject thus—first, here are *two evils* about young believers and young children, and these are wandering and weakness. They are far away from God by nature, and when they are brought nigh they are very weak as to divine things. Secondly, there are *two attributes* in the Lord Jesus to meet with and overcome the two evils: here is strength to gather the wandering with his arm and here is love to cherish weakness till it forgets itself and becometh strong. Thirdly, here are *two operations* performed by the two attributes to meet the two infirmities—here is gathering and here is carrying. It is very delightful to note how our blessed Lord, whose marred face I seem to see at this very moment, does the gathering and the carrying with equal ease. Even now by faith I see his pierced feet pursuing the truant lambs, his wounded hands laying hold upon them, and his bosom so full of the divinest love receiving and bearing them. Do you not hear the sweet accents of his voice saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"? He is still gathering and still carrying by his word and Spirit, and so will he do until he shall come. God help us in this to imitate him to the end.

II. Let us now remember in our text we have AN EXAMPLE FOR THE CHURCH. There are two great things which a church ought always to have, namely, an arm to gather with and a bosom to carry in. I want to speak to you members of the church now not merely about the Sunday-school, but concerning every other part of our soul-seeking and soul-saving work. I want you all to try in the name of God, and in the energy of the Holy Ghost, to be the arm to gather with. "He gathereth the lambs with his arm." They are scattered now, the blood-bought, the ordained of God unto eternal life, are scattered hither and thither and know not the Lord. We are bound to gather them from all places into which they have wandered. They will not come of themselves. The mass of them despise even the outward means of grace. We want a strong arm to gather with, so that they may be compelled to come in. The church's arm is partly the ministry of the word in her midst. Preaching should be attractive enough to gather the people together, for how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear if they will not gather around the preacher? Though certain wise persons pretend to despise the power to gather the multitudes to hear the word, you and I need not mind their decrying it, since we shrewdly suspect that their depreciation

of the gift is caused by their not possessing it themselves: the grapes are always sour if they hang above our reach. But we know who hath told us that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. If it be the gospel that is preached, we should rejoice that by any means the people can be gathered to hear it; and it is plain as a pikestaff that a part of the preacher's aim should be so to preach that men may be gathered to the hearing of it, for if he preacheth and none gather to hear, to what end doth he preach? He might as well get him away to the woods or to the wilderness and there repeat the gospel to himself in solitude, if he hath no desire that men should listen to him. The preacher's voice is to gather, but then amid such teeming multitudes as those of London, the few preachers can never be expected to be the arm of the Lord to gather alone. We must gather the young by Sabbath schools, and endeavour to retain them when they grow up. We must gather them by the distribution and sale of good books and other pure literature: the colporteur has, in this respect, his work to do to gather in the villages and hamlets. We must gather them by visiting from house to house; your tract distributors, your city missionaries, your Bible women, these must be the arm of the Church to gather many; but still the work will not be done unless we have more help than all these. Every Christian must be a gatherer, each one gathering his one. In the power of the Holy Spirit we must all seek out the wanderers. If you cannot bring sheaves you must glean ear by ear; if you cannot preach to hundreds you must endeavour to gather individuals by your holy conversation, by your pious lives, by the orderly ruling of your family, and by using every occasion that God gives you to speak a good word for Christ. *Gather.* I give you this word, all of you dear members of the church, as your watchword. Gather ye, gather ye, gather ye, the people together. Bring them in where Jesus is uplifted, and his gospel sounded forth. Try and find them out in the lonely places whither they are scattered in the cloudy and dark day. There are many of you, and you can go into all sorts and nooks and corners, for you dwell in all sorts of places. Let no spot be unvisited in your mission of love. Go, ye rich, and gather in from the parlour and from the drawing-room: go, ye poor, and gather in from the cottage, and even from the workhouse. Go, you who labour, and gather amongst the sons of toil: go, ye that toil not, neither do ye spin, and spend your ample leisure in winning souls from among those with whom you associate. So shall the blood-redeemed ones be fetched out and formed into a goodly flock, and Christ by you shall gather both lambs and sheep with his arm.

But the church's second work is to carry in her bosom. Those who are brought to Christ need nurture, instruction, example, edification. "Feed my sheep," saith he, and yet again, "Feed my lambs." The preacher should try to do this, suiting his discourse to the weakest and feeblest lamb; but since he is but one, and taketh not upon himself the responsibility of others, the whole church should try to be a nursing mother unto those who are born unto her. Beloved, carry the young converts; take the convinced of sin and pity them, cheer them, fight against their despondencies, battle with their doubts, enlighten their ignorance, and so bear them in your bosom. And then, when they begin to grow strong and work for Christ, encourage them, carry them in the

bosom of your earnest prayer, asking God to make them workmen: not to be ashamed, doing the Master's work right wisely and well. When they succeed in their service, carry them in the bosom of your loving admiration; and when you see them grow in grace till they are strong, carry them in the bosom of your fellowship, remembering that no child of God can afford to be unloved and lonely. Those who do not need your help will need your love; those who do not require encouragement will nevertheless be glad of your sympathy. Carry all your brothers and sisters in your bosom. You will be Christlike if you do so. It is the church's work in this to imitate her great Lord, and let the beloved of Christ be carried in her bosom of affection. May your arm always have strength to labour, and your heart love wherewith to cherish: may this church never lack for arms that shall encompass the neighbouring population, and never lack for a heart that shall be warm towards those who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Hand and heart must go together; by these two our work must be fully done. May they be both evermore in full activity, even as they are seen in Christ, our blessed exemplar.

III. We shall close with a practical word or two upon THE MODEL TEACHER. He who gathers the lambs with his arm and carries them in his bosom is the model of a Sunday-school teacher. In what points? First, there should be about the teacher attractiveness, in order that he may *gather*. You cannot gather hearts and spirits by force. The Board School may gather its children by law, but you must gather yours by love. You cannot keep a class of children around you by the fear of punishment. It must be by some attraction which will hold them with the cords of love and the bands of a man. Our Lord Jesus gathers with his arm because he is so full of love, and of that which wins love. His character is so amiable that it draws men to it as a loadstone draws the needle. This is the arm with which he gathers. Oh that all teachers had more of it! A little child one morning was eating her breakfast with a spoon, and the sun shone in upon her little mess of broth, and as she lifted a spoonful to her mouth she said, "Mother, what do you think? I have eaten a spoonful of sunshine." I recommend that diet to all Sunday-school teachers; take a great many spoonfuls of sunshine into your nature, and let it shine in your very face and glitter in your talk. Your Master had it. The people loved to listen to him. They felt when they drew near to him as if they were like a ship that had entered into port and could cast anchor. Even when they did not receive all that he said, there was a charm about his manner, his spirit, and his tone. Ask, O ye teachers, ask for yourselves that God would give you that holy charm which gathers, and pray that he may deliver you from the angry spirit which scatters. Let your charm lie in this, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Carry the love of Christ with you and you will not fail to gather the lambs with your arm.

The next thing is, after you have attracted, *uplift*. He carries the lambs in his bosom, and therefore he must lift them up. They were on the ground till he raised them. Everything about a teacher should tend to raise the children. You are to go down to the child first and make yourself understood, but you are not to keep down, and become yourself childish. To tell children a lot of tales merely to amuse them is but to roll in the dust with the lambs, and not to carry them. You may tell the tale, and

so come down to the lambs, but it must have its holy lesson, with which you lift the lamb upward towards better things. Do think of this, and let your whole life act in that direction. Your example, your temper, your very dress must be a lift up for the child. How often in this evil city do home influences drag the child downward; the habits, and manners, and customs with which it is surrounded tend to make it grovel in the earth. You have to lift it up, dear teacher, as the great Shepherd of the sheep did, away from its childishness, away from its worldliness (for it gets to be worldly even while a child), away from its sin, away from the corruptions of the wicked world. Ask for grace that every time you see your children you may lift them up, God the Holy Spirit lifting you up all the while. Lift up your heart, or you cannot lift up your child.

The third thing to be noticed is, that when he lifted up the lamb, he *laid it on his heart*. Oh, Sunday-school teacher, this is a very material point with you. If you are to bless the little ones, they must lie on your heart. You must make them feel the life of your religion—there must be a heart and a bosom to it. Let them know that there is something in your religion which looks towards them; that you love their souls, that you sorrow if they neglect the great salvation, and that you will rejoice exceedingly if they be brought to Christ. Uplift them, and then lay them on your heart, and let that heart be warm with holy love.

Next, *bear them forward*. The lamb is put into the shepherd's bosom, not that he may stand still with it all the day long, but because the sheep are going this way and the lambs must go that way too, and therefore he carries it. It is of no use for you to lay a child upon a cold heart; your own heart must be glowing, or it will not be a fit candle for a babe in grace; and then the bosom will be of small service unless the teacher is active as well as affectionate. A child in the bosom of a sluggish teacher will make no progress. You must be always going forward yourself if the child is to go forward with you. I do not believe that any preacher will have a growing congregation if he does not grow himself, nor will any teacher have an advancing class if he or she is not advancing too. Advance in holiness, advance in communion with Christ, advance in perfect consecration to your Lord, and as you do so the dear little children who lie in your bosom will, by God's grace, be carried with you.

The next word is, *guard* the children. Did we not say that Christ placed the lambs in his bosom to protect them? Good Sabbath-school teachers, try to keep your children out of sin and out of harm's way on week days as well as on Sundays. Spiritual teachers of the noblest order want to know what the children do on ordinary days; they try if they can to be their guardian angels from the Monday morning to the Saturday night; they never relax their endeavours to lead the children away from the terrible temptations which surround them in this huge Babylon.

The next word is *cheer*. Did I not say that the Good Shepherd laid the lamb in his bosom to keep it warm and cherish it? So should the good teacher always have a smile for the children and a word of encouragement for them in their little life-battle, for to them it is a great one. Beloved, do all that you can to comfort the little hearts of the young

converts. Help them to believe as God helpeth you. By the divine Spirit try to lead them on in holy joy as the Spirit leadeth you. So shall you be imitators of "that great Shepherd of the sheep," who

"Gently leads the wearied dam,
Gently binds the bruised limb;
And his bosom bears the lamb
Like an infant dear to him.

"He the simplest thoughts instils
He the mildest rules imparts,
Arms with power the weakest wills,
Fills with joy the saddest hearts."

And, last of all, *delight* in them. That tenth verse, with which I shall conclude, has a great charm for me. "The Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him." Well, what did he have before him but the sheep that he went forth to find, and the lambs which he gathered and carried in his bosom? They were his work, but they were also his reward. Teachers of Sabbath schools, your work is before you in your class; your reward is before you too. These boys and girls are to cost you service: do not grudge it, for they will be your reward. Look them in the face and know that they are immortal, and that these are they whom God is able to win for his Son through you, to be the jewels of his diadem, and to be your crowns of rejoicing. The harder and more stubborn a human heart, the more honour it is to win it for the Lord Jesus. The less attention you get at first, the higher will be your reward if winning the attention, you shall by-and-by win the soul. I reckon that your Master will count you to have served him all the more faithfully if you bring from the ragged school the most degraded, the most ignorant, the least taught, and the most depraved. To bring to Christ the children of godly parents is a thing worthy of any one's ambition, but to gather to him the children of the back slums, the children of the debauched and the depraved,—this seems to me to be a more illustrious ambition still. Therefore do I say to you as you traverse these streets of London, Christian men and women, your work is before you, your reward is before you; the teeming masses are at once your sphere of labour and your recompense. There is the soil you have to sow, and there is the harvest which you have to reap. The fields are white, but they are white for the harvest. God give you faith in the gospel that you teach, faith in the Master who taught it before you, faith in the Master who teaches it with you, and go ye forth one and all, each one according to his ability and calling, and gather with your arm, and carry in your bosom, those for whom Christ died. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah x. 7.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23, 402, 400.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TOUCH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 4TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"She said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole."—Mark v. 28.

THE miracle of the healing of this woman occurred while our Saviour was on the road to the house of Jairus to raise his daughter, and I have not much doubt that although, in itself, it was a very remarkable miracle, it was not meant to stand quite alone, but had a relation to the Lord's dealings with Jairus. If I read the narrative rightly, the ruler of the synagogue was about to have his faith severely tried. He had come to the Saviour saying that his daughter was lying at the point of death, and beseeching him to come and heal her; but before he had reached the house other messengers came to say, "Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any further?" Now, in order that the faith of Jairus might be prepared for that shock, our Lord had afforded him the sight of a special miracle wrought upon this woman. Our Lord had said to him, "Fear not; believe only, and she shall be made whole," and as old Bishop Hall says, "to make this good, by the touch of the verge of his garment he revived a woman from the verge of death." It is singular that the case of his little daughter, of twelve years of age, was here placed within the region of hope by our Lord's healing a woman who had been exactly the same time subject to a grievous and incurable malady. A woman who led a living death is healed that Jairus may believe that his dead daughter may be raised to life. Brethren, we never know when God blesses us how much blessing he is incidentally bestowing upon others. It may be that even our conversion had a far-reaching but very distinct connection with the conversion of others. Grace smiles upon its personal subject, but its object reaches beyond the private benefit of the individual. The Lord is strengthening the faith of another of his children, or it may be he is actually working faith in a convinced soul, when he is accepting and honouring our faith, and saving us. We speak of killing two birds with one stone; but our

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Saviour knows how to bless two souls, nay, two thousand souls, with one single touch of his hand.

I will not, however, detain you in the throng of thoughts with which I might preface my discourse upon this interesting narrative, for I long to bring you near to the glorious person of the great Healer of men. Our Lord wrought this miracle while moving on to work another; like the sun, he shines while he pursues his course, and every beam is full of grace. Not only what he does with full purpose is glorious, but he is so full of power and grace that even what he does incidentally by the way is marvellous! The main course and design of his life must ever engross our most earnest thoughts; but even the minor episodes of his life poem are rich beyond expression, nor is there even a point of detail which is without instruction. We cannot exhaust the subject, but must be satisfied to leave out many interesting matters and come at once to the heart of the story.

First, I invite you to look at this woman as *a patient*, and then to observe *the great difficulties with which her faith was surrounded*; thirdly, we will come to *the vanishing point*, and see how all her difficulties fled like the mists of the morning when she thought of Christ; and, lastly, we will dwell upon *her grand success*. It may be the Lord will help us to attain to some greater blessing by enabling us to follow her example. Come, Holy Spirit, and aid our faith, that it may bring us into closer and yet closer contact with our divine Lord.

I. First, then, look at **THE PATIENT**. She was a woman who had suffered from a very grievous malady, which had drained away her life. Her constitution had been sapped and undermined, and her very existence had become one of constant suffering and weakness; and yet *what courage and spirit she displayed*. She was ready to go through fire and through water to obtain health. She must have had a wonderful amount of vitality in her, for where others would have been lying upon the bed of sickness, and long ago despairing, she still for twelve years continued to seek after a cure from one physician or another. Nothing damped or daunted her; she would not give up so long as breath remained. When at last she had found the true physician she plunged into the thick of the crowd to touch him by some means or other. She asked nobody to intercede for her, but with a dauntless courage worthy to be associated with her deep humility, she forced her way through the press to reach the healing Christ. She displayed intense energy and unconquerable spirit in pursuit of health. O that men were a tenth as much alive to the salvation of their souls.

Note also *her resolute determination*. She would die hard, if die she must. She would not resign herself to the inevitable till she had used every effort to preserve life and to regain health. For twelve years it appears she had persevered, in different ways and in the teeth of terrible agonies. We are told that she had suffered many things of many physicians. It is bad enough to suffer many things of one surgeon, but she had suffered many things from many practitioners. The physicians of those days were a great deal more to be dreaded than the worst diseases. If I were now to read to you even a brief account of the surgery practised in olden times, you would shudder, and beg me to close the book. Any reasonable person might prefer to suffer from any form of natural disorder rather than

submit himself to the hands of the doctors of those days. As for their prescriptions, they were horrible. Even those of a couple of hundred years ago, to be found in such books as "Culpepper's Herbal," are such a mess and mass of all manner of abominations that it would surely be better to die than to be drenched with such detestable concoctions. What with cupping, leeching and cutting, cauterizing, blistering, and incision, strapping, puncturing, and putting in setons, patients were made to undergo all manner of unimaginable tortures. The physicians of her day were worthy to have been familiars of the Inquisition, for they had reached perfection in the arts of torment. Yet the heroic woman before us endured every process which was supposed to have virtue in it. I know not how many operations she had endured, nor how many gallons of nauseous drugs she had swallowed, but they had certainly caused her a vast amount of suffering and bitter disappointment. Meanwhile her money had been paid away freely till she had nothing left to procure her comforts when she most needed them. As long as her money lasted she never stinted a single penny of it. The resolution of the woman is well worthy of being observed. She is determined that, if beneath the sky there is a cure, that cure she will have, and as long as there is life left in her that life shall be spent in somehow or other seeking to baffle death of his immediate prey. I am glad when I see such resolution in an awakened soul; but how seldom is it to be seen. I am happy when a man, however ignorant of the way of salvation, nevertheless resolves, "I will be saved if salvation be obtainable. Whatever is to be suffered, whatever is to be given up, whatever is to be done, if there be any way of salvation procurable by any means, I will have it. The whole world shall not be reckoned too great an expense; self-denial of the most arduous kind shall be a trifle to me, if I may but be saved." Surely, brethren, the salvation of our immortal soul is worthy of all the intensity of zeal, constancy of purpose, and resoluteness of determination of which we are capable? Who shall count its worth? Against what shall we weigh the soul? Fine gold of the merchants is as dross compared with our undying spirit, the diamond and the costly crystal are not to be named in comparison with it. Job said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life"; and truly the ransom of the soul is precious. It is a hopeful sign, a gracious token, when there is a determination wrought in men that, if saved they can be, saved they will be.

I admire also this woman's *marvellous hopefulness*. She still believes that she can be cured. She ought to have given up the idea long ago according to the ordinary processes of reasoning; for generally we put several instances together, and from these several instances we deduce a certain inference. Now she might have put the many physicians together, and their many failures, and have rationally inferred that her case was past hope. She might have said, "My disease is incurable. I must ask for patience to bear it till I die, but no longer dream of a cure." But no, bright-eyed woman as I have no doubt she was, she saw hope where others would have despaired. Something within her buoyed her up, and she still had hopes of better days, and so, when she heard of Jesus, her heart leaped within her. Her hope said, "The blessing has come at last. I have long waited for it, and now God has sent it to

me. Here it is; and I will seize it at once. Now has the sun of righteousness arisen upon me with healing beneath his wings, and I will bathe in his sunlight. Now I have escaped from mere pretenders, and I have found one who has real power to heal." You see, then, the patient. A woman of spirit, of resolution, and of hopefulness. Such persons make grand workers when they are converted. May God grant that I may have many such men and women before me, and may the Master come this morning by his Spirit and do his healing work upon them.

II. But now, secondly, I beg you to join with me in considering THE DIFFICULTIES OF THIS WOMAN'S FAITH. They must be weighed in order to show its strength. The difficulties of her faith must have been as follows.

First, she could hardly forget *that the disease was in itself incurable, and that she had long suffered from it*. Taken early, many maladies may be greatly mitigated, if not altogether removed; but it was now very late in the day with this poor sufferer. Twelve years,—it is a long, long portion of human life during which to have been continually drained of the very sustenance of that life. To pine and bleed for twelve years is enough to render one hopeless. Can a cure be possible? Can the disease which has taken root in the body for twelve years be eradicated? Can the incurable be healed after all? Her heart would naturally enquire, how can this thing be? Do you wonder that after being so long weakened by her complaint, and rendered more and more infirm by its long continuance, if it looked to her to be an utter impossibility that she should be healed? Yet observe her conduct and admire it: she staggered not, but believed in Jesus.

And then again *she had endured frequent disappointments; and all these must have supplied her with terrible reasons for doubting*. "Yes," she might have said, "I remember the first physician I applied to, how he told me it was a very small matter, and that if I would purchase a bottle of the large size of his Egyptian elixir, which he had imported from the tombs of the Pharaohs at enormous expense, I should speedily be well. Alas, he only relieved me of my gold. Then another famous professor assured me that his pills would do the work if I took them some three hundred times, and was careful to purchase them only of himself, as he alone possessed the secret, and no one else could prepare the genuine article. He had no doubt that I should be greatly improved after the three hundredth box; but, alas, after tedious delay, I was no better." She recollected how, under each new treatment, she interpreted every little change in herself into a hopeful sign, but soon found herself rudely shaken out of her dream by an increase of the evil. Her adventures were many, but all alike sad in their end. She remembered the grave old physician to whom she went some years ago, who shook his learned head, and assured her that he had scarcely ever met with a more terrible case; it was a great mercy for her that she had come to him, for there was not another man in Palestine who understood the disease. He believed that he could certainly stay the issue by the daily use of his Balm of Lebanon, prepared from the best gums of the cedar, and the richest juices of odoriferous herbs, mixed in an extraordinary manner, in accordance with the suggestions of the ancients and the observations of many years of practice. It was a mercy indeed that he had a filia

left of this matchless balm, which she could have at a very moderate price considering how much expense it was to him. She had taken it, but it had made her feel a new pain, and had brought on a fresh disease. She had paid heavily to endure two maladies instead of one. She had changed her doctor, and this time engaged a Greek physician, who heartily condemned all his predecessors as fools, and taught a system so profound that the poor woman could not understand him at all, but believed in him none the less for that, for she set it down to her own ignorance and his deep learning. He failed, however, and she then tried a Roman doctor, a plain, blunt, practical man, who talked no Greek, but was greatly skilled in the rough and ready treatment of wounded soldiers. After trying medicines for a very considerable time, he informed her that hers was a very suitable case for a famous operation which he had himself first practised—a beautiful operation indeed. He had tried it on many scores, and although none had recovered, he believed that his treatment was the best known. She had declined that heroic operation, but she had endured another, and another, until she moved about painfully, with the scars in her flesh of wounds which she had received in the house of her medical friends. When we consider the long story of which I have thus tried to make a rough draft, it would not have been at all extraordinary if she had said, “I cannot trust anybody else. Now I give it up. I would sooner die than be tortured any more. Better to let nature alone than that I should put myself into the hands of any more of these infallible deceivers.” Yet she was not dismayed: her faith rose superior to her bitter experience, and she believed in the Lord. It is more easy for me to tell this to you than it is for any of us to realise what her difficulty really must have been. If you too have tried by good works, by ceremonies, by prayers and tears, to obtain salvation, and have been defeated at all points, it is not extraordinary that you should be slow to believe that you can ever be saved. May your faith also, like hers, swim over the crests of the billows of disappointment, and may you hope in the Almighty Saviour.

There was also another difficulty in her way, and that was, *her vivid sense of her own unworthiness*. When she thought of Jesus, she viewed him as a person who was holy as well as powerful: she revered as well as trusted him. I am sure she did, for though she summoned courage enough to touch him, her modesty led her to go behind him, as unworthy to be seen. She was evidently afraid to face him, lest he, knowing her unworthiness, as she knew it, should spurn her, and forbid her approach. She was an unclean woman, according to the ceremonial law, and the shame of her disease prevented her venturing upon any verbal request, or open application. She had great confidence in his power and mercy, but she had equal awe of his purity, and therefore feared that he would be angry if she touched him. This must have very much hampered her. “How shall I venture to draw near to him? The other physicians I could approach, for I knew them to be very like myself, but concerning him I find that he is a prophet mighty in word and deed—a man of God, and something more. How shall I dare to approach to him?” The thought that she would go behind shows her ignorance of the Lord’s divinity or her forgetfulness of the attribute of omniscience, but still it proves that she laboured under a sense of unworthiness,

and yet she believed. Ah, dear hearers, when you are bowed down with a sense of your own sin and folly, may the Holy Spirit lead you still to believe that Jesus Christ is able to make you whole.

I do not know whether the other difficulty did occur to her at all, but it would to me, namely, that *she had now no money*. She had spent all her living, we are told,—all her living. The physicians whom she had previously consulted had all been great in the matter of fees; they could diminish her wealth if they could not establish her health. She had carefully approached them with promises of large reward, assuring them that anything she could give would be freely rendered if she could but be cured; but now she can offer nothing. Her disease remains, but her estate is gone. She is reduced to poverty by her efforts after health: how shall she come before the great Physician of whom she has heard so much? I should not wonder but what the thought of his great-heartedness and the many cures which he had wrought gratuitously helped her to get over that difficulty, but still it occurs to many to dream of purchasing salvation, and to this day many need to be reminded that Jesus gives his grace to those who have no money nor any other price to offer him. His terms are "without money and without price," but many awakened consciences forget this.

Perhaps the worst difficulty of all was *her extreme sickness at that time*. We read that she was nothing better, but rather grew the worse. She had been bad enough before, but they had aggravated the disease with their strong acrid medicines, and sharp incisions, and fierce blisters. They had made her worse than nature would have left her if it had been let alone. She had reached a frightful stage of the disease and was confessedly beyond all human help. She was as bad as she could be to crawl about at all. Usually such a sickness depresses the spirits, unnerves the mind, and makes the sufferer feel a want of energy, so that, resolute woman as she was, we should little have marvelled if she had said, "No, I can do no more, I must yield; there is nothing now but to lay me down and die, for I am in such a condition that all attempts to gain health are futile." What a grand faith was hers which made her rise above her weakness, overcome her depression of spirit, throw aside the lethargy which was creeping over her, and believe that everything was altered now, for she had no longer to deal with a pretender who would fail her, but with one sent of God and clothed with infinite power, who could meet her case—even hers.

III. So now we come to our third point, which is *THE VANISHING POINT OF ALL HER DIFFICULTIES*. We read of her first that *she had heard of Jesus*. It is Mark who tells us that, "When she had heard of Jesus." "Faith cometh by hearing." What had she heard of him? Is it not more than probable that she had been told of that scene which is pictured in Luke's gospel, in the sixth chapter and the nineteenth verse, when "The whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all." On one especial day great multitudes followed our Lord and pressed upon him to touch him, for whosoever touched him was healed of whatsoever disease he had. What a wonderful scene that must have been when men were so enthusiastic to be blest that they thronged the great Physician! Not that our Lord was more able to save on one day than on another, but that still there

were certain days in which the power seemed to emanate from his person more mightily than at other times, always, as I judge, in proportion to the faith of the people who surrounded him. On that occasion, being followed by a great company who believed in his healing power, they saw such wonders wrought that they made a general rush at his blessed person, and all who touched obtained healing. Some conceive that even the healthy touched him and gained greater vigour from the touch. I should not wonder: at least, in spiritual things it is so. The woman had heard of all the wondrous cures he had wrought, and she said to herself, "Then I will touch him, and be healed; for if these reports are true, then if I may but touch him I too shall be made whole." She seems to have believed Christ to be charged with marvellous power, somewhat like a Leyden jar charged with electricity, which gives forth its power most freely. She was not a woman of any very great wisdom, her chief quality was energy. She made a great blunder about our Lord and his garments, but it did not touch the vital point; she so thought of him as to glorify his power, and it sufficed. She truly believed *in him*, and if you believe in Christ, though you are in the dark about a thousand things, your faith will save you. If you do but really believe in Jesus all your mistakes about him will not really destroy his power to bless you, nor set his heart against you, nor destroy the value of your faith. "If I touch but his clothes," saith she, "he is so full of power that he will heal me."

The point to notice most distinctly is this. The poor woman believed that the faintest contact with Christ would heal her. Notice the words of my text: "If I may touch but his clothes." It is not, "If I may but touch his clothes,"—no, the point does not lie in the touch, it lies in what was touched: "If I may touch *but his clothes*: if I cannot get near enough to him to touch his flesh, if I may touch but his clothes. Such is the power which dwells in him that it overflows even into his garments; and while he wears them they are charged with the virtue which I need; it reaches even to the blue fringe which, as a Hebrew, he wears upon the edge of his robe. I am sure if I touch but that fringe, if I cannot do any more, there will be a connection between him and me, and I shall be healed." Splendid faith! It was not more than Christ deserved, but yet it was remarkable. It was a kind of faith which I desire to possess abundantly. The slenderest contact with Christ healed the body, and will heal the soul; ay, the faintest communication. Do but become united to Jesus, and the blessed work is done. Effect the junction, and the virtue comes to you. "If I touch but his clothes, I shall be made whole."

I want you carefully to observe that the woman did not seem to think anything about herself. You could not lay the stress upon the pronoun, "If *I* touch but his clothes, *I* shall be made whole"; it would not be in accordance with the context. No, it is "If I touch but his clothes." It does not matter who I may be, what my uncleanness may be, what my character may be, what my state of mind may be, if I touch but his clothes, contact being established, I shall be healed. Every person who comes into contact with Jesus by the touch of faith will partake of his healing power. She knew this, and shut her eyes to all other considerations. She lays no stress upon any mode of touching; no—"If I touch

but his clothes,"—not embrace him, nor grasp him, hold him, wrestle with him—no, she believes that any sort of contact will answer the purpose. Now it is always a blessed thing when a man is taught of God to forget himself, and even to forget his faith, and only think upon the Lord Jesus, who is the object of our trust. I admire this woman's single eye: she sees nothing but Jesus. Dear heart, she felt that the virtue to heal was all *in him*, and not in her, nor in her touch. She knew that, whatever she might be, his power could master every difficulty of her case, and that the result did not depend upon the mode of her touch, nor the length during which it lasted, but on him alone. It was from him that the virtue was to come, and come it would, however slender the contact. This faith is worth cultivating. To forget everything else, and only to consider the Lord Jesus and his power to bless: this is wisdom. Here am I, a poor lost sinner, but if I can only get to Jesus I shall be forgiven and saved. Here am I, vexed with unruly passions, diseased with this sin and that, but if I may only touch him, he is so full of healing power that, mass of spiritual disease though I may be, the moment I touch him, his virtue will battle with my disease and vanquish it for ever. Behold this woman. Again fix your eye upon her till you have become like her. All her thoughts have gone towards the Lord Jesus. She has forgotten herself, forgotten the rampant fury of her disease, forgotten her being behind and out of sight, and even her own touch of him she has put into a secondary place. Everything she looks for must come out of him. She knows that connected with him she will obtain the blessing, but apart from him she will abide in her misery. "If I may touch but his clothes,"—not because his garments are in themselves powerful, but because they are "*his* clothes,"—the garments which he is wearing, and which consequently will be a medium of communication with himself. There is the vanishing point then, she has come to think of Jesus and of the certainty of cure through contact with him. If you, seeking sinners, would but think more of Christ all would be well. You who cannot believe, if you would relinquish your perpetual thoughts about your faith and even about your sin, and begin to think of him,—the Son of God, exalted to be a priest and a Saviour, the Christ whose finished work is all for sinners, the Christ of the resurrection, Jesus the ever living, Jesus in whom all power dwelleth, methinks you would soon obtain eternal salvation. When your whole heart sets itself upon him and no more upon itself, you will enter into peace, and enjoy rest for your souls.

IV. Fourthly, let us speak of HER GRAND SUCCESS. Let me remind you again, however, of how she gained her end. She gave to the Lord Jesus an intentional and voluntary touch. Upon the intentional character of it I must insist for a minute. She pressed into the crowd, she was hustled about I do not doubt, and in her weak state ready to faint, or even to die. In the midst of those rough men who pressed about the Saviour, she found no sympathy. But she is desperately resolute, and bound, by hook or by crook, to touch his clothes. She presses in behind, for she cares not where she touches him, but touch him she must. In the throng the garments of Christ became entangled, and at some little distance from him she perceives just a bit of the blue fringe hanging out behind. Now is her time, she has only got to touch *that*—so strong is

her faith, that even the hem of his garment suffices her, for it will make a connection between her and the Saviour, and that is all she needs. Her finger is put out, and the deed is done. Yet note that she was not healed by a contact with the Lord or with his garment against her will: she was not pushed against him accidentally, but the touch was active, and not merely passive. "Thou seest," said one of the apostles, "the multitude thronging thee and pressing thee." There was nothing remarkable of efficacious about such unavoidable and involuntary touches. Her touch was her own distinct, intentional, voluntary act, and it was done under the persuasion that it would bring her a cure. Such is the faith which brings salvation. It is not every contact with Christ that saves men; it is the arousing of yourself to come near to him, the determinate, the personal, resolute, believing touch of Jesus Christ which saves. We must believe for ourselves. The Spirit helps us, but we ourselves believe. Some of you sit still and hope that the Lord will visit you, and you wait by the pool till an angel comes and stirs the water, and all that kind of thing; but that is not according to the tenor of the gospel command. The gospel does not come to you and say, "Whosoever waits for impressions shall be saved;" but it says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ: for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Exercise the personal, voluntary, intentional act of faith and you shall be saved. Oh, I would to God that some sinner here, deeply conscious of his guilt, might be aroused to perform that act this morning. However little your knowledge, believe in Jesus as far as you know him. Though you can only come into contact with that part of Christ which you have learned from the Scriptures, that little of Christ is a part of himself, and you will have touched *him*. You may not be acquainted with the deep things of God, nor with the high doctrines which honour our adorable Lord, but what you do know will suffice for faith. If you say, "I will trust the Lamb of God," and really do so, then you have come into contact with him, and you are saved. Ay, though it be but a believing prayer, a believing sigh, a believing tear, you have really reached him, and you are made whole; but the touch of faith must be your own act and deed. Nobody is saved in his sleep, nobody may claim to have been transformed into a living soul unless he can prove it by the living act of trust. There must be this appropriating faith, and this the woman had.

And now see her grand success; she no sooner touched than she was healed; in a moment, swift as electricity, the touch was given, the contact was made, the fountain of her blood was dried up, and health beamed in her face immediately. Immediate salvation! I heard a person say the other day that he had heard of immediate conversion, but he did not know what to make of it. Now, herein is a marvellous thing, for such cases are common enough among us. In every case spiritual quickening must be instantaneous. However long the preparatory process may be, there must be a time in which the dead soul begins to live. There must be a time in which the babe is not born, and a moment in which it is born. We are pardoned, or else condemned: there must be a moment in which the man is not pardoned, and another in which he is, and that must be an inappreciable period of time. I grant you that many workings of conscience, and so on, may go before and melt

into the actual reception of life, so as to make it appear a gradual work ; but the actual birth the divine quickening by which the man is made to live in Christ, must of necessity be instantaneous in every case. A man is brought by degrees to a deep sense of sin, to the renunciation of self, and so on ; but there is no period in which a man lies between death and life ; he either is alive unto God or he is dead in sin : if he is dead he is dead, and if he is alive he is alive, but there is no state between the two. A man is either regenerate or unregenerate ; there is no borderland or neutral territory between the two conditions. This woman was healed in a moment, and God can save you, my dear hearers, in an instant. May he do it now ! If now you believe, it is done.

There may be cases in which a blessing comes to a man and he is scarcely aware of it, but this woman knew that she was saved ; she felt in herself that she was whole of her plague. I do not say that I would like to have undergone her twelve years' of suffering for the sake of that moment's joy, but I am sure she was quite content to have done so. The joy of the first hour in which you know you are saved ! It is almost too much to live with. It is well that it does not continue in all its vehemence and ecstasy. That flash of light, brighter than the sun ! That flush, that flood, that torrent of unutterable bliss, which bears all before it ; when at last we can say, "My sins are assuredly removed from me—I am saved : and know it within myself"—that joy, I say, is beyond all description. Blessed be God if we have known that bliss ! Blessed be God, I say, and I would repeat the thanks a thousand times. Oh, touch the Saviour, poor sinner. The Lord deliver thee from anything of thine own, and bring thee now to look for all to Jesus, and thou shalt know in thyself that thou art whole of thy plague.

She had next the assurance from Christ himself that it was so, but she did not obtain that assurance till she had made an open confession. She felt in herself that she was whole, but there was more comfort in reserve for her. The Lord Jesus Christ would have those who follow him come forward and no longer hide in the crowd. Those who believe ought to be baptized on confession of their faith. He who in his heart believeth should with his mouth make confession of him. So Christ turned round and said, "Who touched my clothes ?" At the hearing of that enquiry the newly-kindled flame of her joy began to damp under the fear of losing what she had stolen. Down went her spirits below zero. Then the officious disciples said, "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and pressing thee, and sayest thou, who touched me ?" but Jesus said, as he looked around again, "Somebody hath touched *me*." For not his clothes alone, but himself, had been touched by somebody. That poor "somebody" wanted to sink into the earth : I know she did. She trembled as Jesus looked for her. Those blessed eyes looked around, and by-and-by they lighted upon her, and as she gazed upon them she did not feel so much alarmed as before ; but, still afraid and trembling, she came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. Then he gently raised her up, and said, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole ; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." Now she knew her cure from Christ's lips as well as from her own consciousness. She had now the divine witness bearing witness with her spirit that she

was indeed a healed one. Mark then, that those of you who desire to obtain the witness of the Spirit should come forward and confess your faith and tell what the Lord has done for you : then shall you receive the sealing witness of the Spirit with your spirit that you are indeed born of God. God help you tremblers who have at last touched my Master's hem to acknowledge it bravely before all and specially before himself.

Brethren, the wine which cometh out of these grapes is this : the slightest connection with Jesus will bless us. I desire to send you away with this one truth upon your minds. Whether you are a child of God or not a child of God, hear this weighty doctrine. This woman believed the matchless truth, that the least touch of Christ will cure. "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be made whole." Believe this, I pray you, each one for himself.

If you, dear child of God, feel very depressed this morning—cold-hearted, dead, sluggish : if you touch but his clothes you shall become warm-hearted again. You shall get all your life and vigour and enthusiasm back again if you only draw near to your Lord. Do I hear you say "I seem so full of doubts, so depressed in spirits, so unhappy. I trust I am converted, but I cannot rejoice ;" then, brother, get a fresh hold of your Lord, for if you touch but his clothes you shall be made whole of the plague of doubting. Only draw near to Jesus, your risen Lord, by a prayer, or a believing thought, and it is done. Be it ever so slight a touch you shall be made whole. Perhaps you say, "I feel so discouraged in my Christian work, and even feel as if I must give it up. I have seen no conversions lately, and therefore I cannot go about my work with the spirit I once had." Brother, you are falling into a spiritual lethargy, but if you do but touch your Lord again you shall be made whole. Did not the Lord Jesus heal you at the first? He can heal you still. He loses no virtue when he gives forth his power. If a master takes a scholar and fills him full of wisdom the master is just as wise afterwards as he was at first, and when our Lord grants us a fulness of grace he remains as full of grace as he was originally. Come to him, then, ye downcast saints. Come now. Come always. If any of you have backslidden ; if you have become altogether wrong and out of sorts ; if your spiritual digestion is bad ; if your spiritual eyes are dim, so that you cannot see afar off ; if your knees are weak and if your hands hang down, if your whole head is sick and your heart faint, yet still if you touch but your Lord's garments you shall be made whole. This wonderful medicine has boundless power to restore from relapses as well as to heal the first disease. I cannot help reminding you of the church at Laodicea, which was in so horrible a state that our Lord himself said he must spue it out of his mouth, and yet he added, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Communion is the cure for lukewarmness. When you have fallen so low that even Christ himself is sick of you—and it must be a very bad case when he becomes sick of a church—yet even then if you but sup with him and he with you all will be well. Only get into communion with him who has life in himself and your own life shall become full of vigour. Oh, dear children

of God, if you have fallen into an unhappy state, put in practice the example of the woman, and see whether Jesus is not still the same. A touch is a very simple matter, but do not, therefore, doubt its value.

As for you who fear that you are not his children, behold, I set before you an open door this morning, and I pray God that you may be enabled to enter into it. If you touch but the Redeemer's clothes you shall be made whole. Whatever the transgression, the iniquity, the sin, of which you have been guilty, come into contact with the bleeding Lamb and you shall be forgiven. You need not even so much as touch, for there is life in *a look*. A look will set up sufficient contact to bring salvation. "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." "They looked unto him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed." Do but look, do but get out of yourself to him somehow or other, and it is done. Though a glance will not carry a thread as thin as a spider's cobweb, yet it will establish a connection. The ray of light which comes from Jesus' wounds to your eye will be link enough and along it eternal salvation will come to you. Get to Christ, sinner, get to Christ at once. Have you come to him? Then you are saved. Confess your faith, and give Jesus honour. Love him with all your heart; and while angels are rejoicing over you, do you be glad also. Christ hath saved you, praise him for ever and ever. May the Lord add his blessing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew ix. 9—31.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—174, 415, 603.

"The Sunday School Teachers' Manual," by W. H. Groser, contains the following remarks upon Mr. SPURGEON'S

COMMENTING & COMMENTARIES.

"Mr. Spurgeon has rendered invaluable service to teachers and preachers by preparing a guide book to expository literature, under the title of "Commenting and Commentaries," and which may be had for half-a-crown. It is conspicuous for variety of information, fairness, and acumen. We heartily recommend this laborious and useful work."

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE CAUSE AND CURE OF WEARINESS IN SABBATH-SCHOOL TEACHERS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 8TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

At a Convention of the Sunday-school Union.

"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."—Galatians vi. 9.

THIS verse occurs in the Epistle to the Galatians, which so plainly sets forth the grand doctrine of justification by faith, and teaches us, most plainly, that salvation is not of works, but of grace. As if to confound for ever those who say that the doctrine of free grace is impractical, the apostle, before he closes his epistle, exhorts believers to labour, and in the verse before us gives us a sentence worthy to be printed in letters of gold and hung up for ever before the eyes of all Christian workers, "Be not weary in well doing." It is true, my brethren, that you are not to save yourselves by well doing. Your motive is not selfish, but because you are saved already you desire to manifest the power of gratitude, and to prove to all the world that those who receive a free salvation are the very men who most cheerfully labour to please God and to bring glory to his name. O ye who are debtors to infinite mercy, "Be not weary in well doing."

The apostle, at the time he wrote our text, had in his mind's eye the well doing which by its alms does good unto all men, and also that kindness which leads hearers of the gospel to communicate in all good things unto him that teacheth. Truly it is easy to be weary in these matters. Almsgiving certainly is disheartening work. One is so continually being deceived that giving to the poor becomes a weary business. Impostors abound on all sides: this city of London swarms with impostors who would deceive Solomon himself. I do not wonder that men are driven to organize their charity, which frequently means bringing it to an end. The tendency is to excuse themselves because at some time or other they have been victimized. A cruel hardness is abroad

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which talks philosophy, and abjures almsgiving for fear of disturbing our delightful social economy. Almsgiving, if we are to believe some men, has become a crime, and the truly good man is he who never interferes with the work of the poor law. To these people it seems odd that our Lord should have commended anything so inconsistent with political economy as giving to the poor. According to the modern school we may expect those to be blessed who see people hungry and give them no meat, thirsty and give them no drink, sick and in prison and never visit them; because hungry people should go to the parish, and thirsty people to the pump. I trust, however, that the Christian spirit which is pitiful to the poor will never die out among us, and that, notwithstanding all the difficulties under which we may have to labour, we may not be weary in well doing, for despite all deceits and impositions, in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

I am sure I shall not be wrong in taking the text from its immediate connection and applying it to the work of Sabbath-schools: for, first of all, I am sure, brethren and sisters, that *your work is well described in the text*—it is well doing. Secondly, I am equally clear that *you are liable to the evils mentioned here*, which are common to all Christian service—weariness and faintness: and it is equally clear that *the consolation and encouragement of the text may truthfully be enjoyed by you*. “In due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

I. First, then, I know you will all agree with me that **YOUR WORK IS WELL DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT.**

It may be set forth in so many words as *well doing*. You entered upon it because you felt it to be so, and you continue in it for the same reason. Another description of Christian work is implied in the promise of reaping: your work is *sowing*. Take the two ideas of well doing and sowing, and they will both be found to be exceedingly well embodied in holy labour among the young.

Sunday-school work is *well doing*. How can it be otherwise, for *it is an act of obedience*? I trust you have entered upon it because you call Jesus your Master and Lord, and you wish to fulfil the great command, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” You find children to be creatures, fallen creatures, but still lovable little things, full of vigour, and life, and glee. You see them to be a component part of the race, and you conclude at once that your Master’s command applies to them. You are not like the disciples who would put them back, for you have learned from their mistake, and you remember the words of their Master and yours, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.” You know, too, that “out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he hath ordained strength because of the adversary;” so that you are sure that he included the little ones in the general commission when he said, “Preach the gospel to every creature.” You are doubly sure that you are obeying his will because you have certain special precepts which relate to the little ones, such as “Feed my lambs,” and “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it.” You know that it is our duty to preserve alive a testimony in the world, and therefore you are anxious to teach the word to your children that they may teach it to their children, that so, from generation to generation, the word of the Lord may be made known. Be the task pleasant

or irksome to you, it is not yours to hesitate but to obey. The love which has redeemed you also constrains you. You feel the touch of the sacred hand upon your shoulder, the hand which once was pierced, and you hear your Redeemer say, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you;" and because of that sending, you go forth to the little ones in obedience to his will. He who obeys is doing well, and in this sense your service among the little ones is well doing.

Well doing it is, again, because *it brings glory to God*. We must always continue to receive from God, who is the great fountain of goodness and blessing, but yet, in infinite condescension, he permits us to make him some return. As the dewdrop reflects the beam with which the great sun adorns it, so may we, in our measure, make the light of our great Father to sparkle before the eyes of men. Our lives may be as the rivers which run into the sea from whence they originally came. Whenever we attempt that which will clearly promote the divine glory, we are well doing. When we make known Jehovah's grace, when we work in accordance with his purposes of love, when we speak forth the truth which honours his beloved Son; whenever, indeed, the Holy Spirit through us bears witness to the eternal verities of the gospel, there is well doing towards God. We cannot increase his intrinsic glory, but through his Spirit we can make his glory to be more widely seen: and among the choicest ways of doing this we give a high place to the teaching of children the fear of the Lord, in order that they may be a seed to serve him, and to rejoice in his salvation.

And who shall doubt that Sabbath-school work is *well doing towards man*? The highest form of charity is to teach our fellow-man the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thou mayest give bread to thy fellow, but when he has eaten it is gone; if thou givest him the bread of life it abides with him for ever. Thou mayest give him bread in plenty, but in due time he will die as his fathers have done before him; but if thou givest him the bread of heaven, and he eat thereof, he shall live for ever. God has enabled thee to hand out to him immortal food, even Jesus, who is "that bread from heaven." What a blessing it is to a man if you are the instrument of changing his heart, and so of emancipating him from vice and making him free unto holiness? To lead a soul to Christ is to lead it to heaven. It is assuredly a noble part of benevolence to deliver the gospel to the sons of men; and, if possible, this benevolence is of a still higher kind when you deliver the truth of God to children, for as prevention is better than a cure, so is it better to prevent a life of vice than to rescue from it; and as the earlier a soul has light the shorter is its night of darkness, so the earlier in life salvation comes to the heart the better, and greater is the benediction. To receive the dew of grace while we are yet in the dew of youth is a double boon.

Brethren, your work is one of well-doing, of the most thorough and radical kind, for you strike at the very root of sin in the child by seeking his regeneration. You desire, by the grace of God, to win the heart for Christ at the beginning of life, and this is the best of blessings. I hope you are not among those who only hope to see your children converted when they are grown up, and feel satisfied to let them remain in their sins while they are children. I hope that you pray for the conversion of children as children, and are working to that end by

the Spirit's gracious aid. If you are doing so I know not of any service more fit to engage the angels of heaven, if they could be permitted to undertake it. Surely, if they could teach the gospel to mankind, and had their choice of learners, they might well pass those by who are already hardened in sin, and who can only give their tottering age to Christ; and gather for him the young whose day is but dawning. We may not set one work against another, but at any rate we may count ourselves happy if our sphere is among the young. Let us gather the rosebuds for Jesus. Let us bring to him the virgin in her earliest beauty, and the young man in his first vigour, before sin and age have quite despoiled them of their charms. Let us find for him those who can give him a whole life, and honour him from dawn till its eve. Oh, it is glorious to have such work for Jesus. Go ye to your youthful charges, rejoicing in your work, for it is well doing.

It is by no means difficult to see that Sunday-school work is *sowing*. Upon this I will not speak much, for the emblem is easy to be understood; your schools are the field, the gospel is the seed, and you are the sowers. Suffer me only to say that yours is a work in which there are great outgoings and apparent losings: even as the sower casts his seed into the earth, buries it, and it is lost to him, so do you spend your strength, your thought, your love, your talent, your time, and at first see no return. You are sacrificing your leisure, and much of the religious privileges of your fellow Christians. You are, as some say, burying yourselves in the school—surrendering ease and repose for unremunerated work. I speak after the manner of men. You engage in these self-denials because you believe that truth, like a seed, ought to be sown, and that it is your duty to sow it. It is frequently said that "truth is mighty, and will prevail"; but this must be qualified by the reflection that truth does nothing by way of conquest till it is spoken out by earnest men. I doubt not that there are hundreds of great truths, in the shape of social reforms, now lying on the shelf, and having little or no power because they have not yet found a brave and earnest tongue to proclaim them. When the man shall come who is ordained to be their spokesman they will ring out like a clarion, and hosts will gather to their standard, but meanwhile they lie like sleeping giants whose might sleeps with them. There is power in truth, as there is life in seed, but it will be hidden till like seed it is sown in favourable soil. It needs a sower, and feeling that truth ought to be sown you consecrate yourselves to that work.

You have, moreover, looked at the children, and you have felt that the soil of their minds ought to be sown. You hope to find good soil at least in some cases, and it strikes you that to delay to sow will be culpable neglect. You are sure that if *you* do not sow the devil will, and that weeds will spring up if wheat be not sown; and you wish, if you can, to get the start of some at least of the devil's servants, and drop in the seeds of divine truth before the grosser vices have come to development. You know that abundance of the seed of noxious plants lies hidden in that plot of ground by nature, as the result of the Fall, but still before they have grown into rank luxuriance you desire to choke the weeds with the rapid growth of heaven's own corn. Your present occupation is to sow the children's minds. You are delighted when you see the seed spring up immediately, but where it tries your patience you

still sow. When I had a little garden of my own, and put in mustard and cress, I went the next morning to see if it was sprouting, and was not satisfied to wait for the due season. I turned over the mould, and I dare say I checked the growth of the seed by my over haste. It is quite possible for teachers to commit the same folly by an unbelieving hurry, expecting to reap to-morrow what they have sown to-day. Immediate fruit may come, for God worketh marvellously, but whether it does or not, your plain duty is to sow. Reap you shall, but meanwhile you must be satisfied to go on sowing, sowing, sowing, even to the end. Reaping is your *reward*, but sowing is your work. Sowing, sowing, ever sowing, till the hand is palsied in death, and the seed basket is carried on another arm. Well doing by sowing the seed is your work.

II. Now, secondly, it appears from the text that in your service YOU WILL MEET WITH EVILS, common to Christian workers of all descriptions: especially will you be liable to weariness and faintness.

Take the first word as it stands in our version; you will be tempted to grow *weary*. Hard work, this teaching children. Some good souls seem born to it, do it splendidly, and enjoy it; to others it is a stern labour. Some are by constitution exceedingly inapt at it, but I do not think that they should excuse themselves by that fact, but should educate themselves into loving the work: many people around us are very inapt at anything which would cause them a perspiration, but we call them lazy, and goad them on. It is no new thing for men to attempt to escape the army by pretending to be in bad health, but we must have none of this cowardly malingering in Christ's army; we must be ready for anything and everything. We must compel ourselves to duty when it goes against the grain. When it is a clear duty, obedience must master our aversion. I have no doubt whatever that teaching is, to some, very toilsome work, but then it has to be done all the same. I delight to hear you speak, dear brethren, with holy enthusiasm of the privilege of teaching children, and I fully believe in it; but I know also that it requires no small degree of self-denial on your part, self-denial for which the church does not always give you due credit. To continue from Sabbath to Sabbath drilling some little Biblical knowledge into those noisy boys, and trying to sober down those giddy girls, is no light amusement or pretty pastime. It must be a toil, and therefore it is not difficult to become weary.

Teachers may the more readily tire because the work lasts on year after year. If you are all Sunday-school teachers I am very happy to perceive so many grey and bald heads among you. It looks well. I admire the veterans of your army. There ought to be an "Old Guard" as well as new regiments. Why leave this work to young beginners? Did not David say, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord," when he was in the prime of life? Why, then, do so many cease to teach when they are best qualified to do so? Have not many aged persons a gentleness and an impressiveness which peculiarly qualify them to arrest the attention of the young? As they know more by experience than most of us, should they not be all the readier to impart instruction? It was always my delight to sit at my grandfather's feet when he told out his experience of the grace of God. When he was eighty years old or more his witness to the faithfulness of God was worth going many miles to hear. There are scores of aged men and women whose

life-story ought to be often told among children; with their loving ways and cheerful manners they would be an acquisition to any school for the children's sake, while to the teachers their weight and wisdom would be an incalculable benefit. Die in harness, my brethren, if your mental and physical vigour will permit. Still, the long round of many years' labour must tend to make the worker weary; and the more so if the work is allowed to become monotonous, as in some schools it certainly is. You go to the same dingy room and sit on the same chair before the same class of boys. It is true the boys are not the same boys, for though the proverb says "Boys will be boys," I find that they will *not* be boys, but that they will be men; but still one boy is so much like another boy that the class is evermore the same. The lessons vary but the truth is the same, and the work of teaching is like the sowing of seed—very much the same thing over and over again. Lovers of change will hardly find in regular Sunday-school work a field for their fickleness. The text says, "Be not weary." Come, brother, are you tired out? How long have you been teaching? A thousand years? You smile, and I smile too, and say—do not be weary with any period of service short of that. Our Lord deserves a whole eternity to be spent in his praise, and we hope so to spend it; and, therefore, let us not be weary with the few years which constitute the ordinary life of man.

I find the Greek word contains the idea of being "disheartened:" "Let us not lose heart." This is a soul-weariness against which we must resolutely fight. It comes to many good workers and shows itself in different ways. Some think the work less important than they did at the first; others fear that their part of it will prove an utter failure. This is heart-weariness. When a Sabbath-school is going down, when there are not so many children as in former years, or, what is equally bad, when there are not enough teachers, the poor superintendent falls into great anxiety, and the teachers at the teachers' meetings are not in the best of spirits. By the way, I am not sure that you teachers always edify one another at those meetings, or that you always have the Spirit of God among you. I have heard otherwise sometimes; and yet I cannot blame you, for I have heard of church meetings too which have not been "like a little heaven below," nor would I say of them, "I have been there and still would go." When the condition of the school is disorder and decline the best of teachers become discouraged and weary. At such times good teachers hardly know how to go to their work at all, for there is not that loving spirit in the school which renders it a happy family, neither is there that power in prayer which secures the great Father's presence, and therefore many become distressed and tire of the service. Now comes in my text, "Be not weary in well doing." Pluck up courage. Do not be a coward. Hope on, hope ever. Work on, even though the task becomes more and more trying to you. Do not despise your vocation, nor stay your hand, be not weary in well doing.

Our text next speaks of our *fainting*. The original word has at its base the idea of being loosened. You know, there is a girding up of the loins which means work, and there is a loosening, not merely of garments, but of sinews, which means that the man will do no more. Some Sunday-school teachers get, as the saying is, upon the loose. They display an utter want of energy: they are unstrung. They do not

teach their classes with all their heart, and soul, and strength, but they get through in a "slipshod" fashion, like a man trudging along with loosened sandals. They teach, but put no honest work into it: their heart is no longer bound to the altar. The school work is performed in routine fashion, and it might almost as well have been let alone. I have seen a man at work in such a sleepy style that I have been ready to cry out, "Dear me! dear me! I cannot endure to see such crawling and creeping! Stand away! Give me your tool, and let me have a turn at it;" and even so might one feel the same about certain teachers. A chapter is read, and remarks made upon it which cost neither thought nor reading; hymns sung without the slightest sign of life, and prayer offered without heart. A living Sunday-school teacher standing by has been ready to weep to see how the children become indifferent because the teacher is trifling. There must be life, force, fire, heart, energy, intensity, put into your service, or it will be valueless. Dear friends, do not fall into a loose state. You shall bind your sheaves soon if you do not become loose in your own minds. You shall reap if you do not become languid and lethargic.

How is it that we ever fall into that state? What are the excuses that we make for ourselves when we faint? At times we are tempted to give it all up. We feel that there is no good being done, and therefore we cannot hold on any longer. What makes us talk so? Is it not the old Adam—our carnal nature? Should we not mortify him, and say, "Now, old Adam, you want me to give up the Sunday-school, and I shall refuse to do so for that very reason"? My idle flesh is saying to me, "Take things a little more leisurely. Do not take extra work upon yourself." Ah, flesh, proud flesh, if I sow to you I shall reap corruption. What a horrible thing it is, that reaping of corruption. The very word seems to swarm with living and moving abominations; its meaning is intensely abhorrent to the pure mind. We must at once reply, "No, flesh, I cannot sow to thee and reap corruption, and therefore you must be denied. I shall mortify you, and continue with my class at the school. I had thought of giving it up, but I will not indulge you so much, but by God's grace I will persevere."

Do you not think that at times our getting lax in Christian work arises from our being very low in grace? As a rule, you cannot get out of a man that which is not in him. You cannot go forth yourself to your class and do your work vigorously if you have lost inward vigour. You cannot minister before the Lord with the unction of the Holy One if that unction is not upon you. If you are not living near to God and in the power of God, then the power of God will not go forth through you to the children of your care; so that I think we should judge, when we become discontented and down-hearted, that we are out of sorts spiritually. Let us say to ourselves, "Come! my soul! What aileth thee? This faint heart is a sign that thou art out of health. Go to the great Physician, and obtain from him a tonic which shall brace thee. Come, play the man. Have none of these whims! Away with your idleness! The reaping-time will come, therefore thrust in the plough."

Is not another reason why we become down-hearted to be found in the coldness and indifference of our fellow Christians? We see others doing the Lord's work carelessly: and when we are all on fire ourselves we find

them to be cold as ice: we get among people in the church who do not seem to care whether the souls of the children are saved or not, and thus we are apt to be discouraged. The idleness of others should be an argument for our being more diligent ourselves. If our Master's work is suffering at the hands of our fellow servants, should we not try to do twice as much ourselves to make up for their deficiencies? Ought not the laggards to be warnings to us lest we also come into the same lukewarm condition? To argue that I ought to be a sluggard because others loiter is poor logic.

Sometimes, too—I am ashamed to mention it—I have heard of teachers becoming weary from want of being appreciated. Their work has not been sufficiently noticed by the pastor, and praised by the superintendent, and sufficient notice has not been taken of them and their class by their fellow-teachers. I will not say much about this cause of faintness, because it is so small an affair that it is quite below a Christian. Appreciation! Do we expect it in this world? The Jewish nation despised and rejected their King, and even if we were as holy as the Lord Jesus we might still fail to be rightly judged and properly esteemed. What matters it? If God accepts us we need not be dismayed, though all should pass us by.

Perhaps, however, *the work itself* may suggest to us a little more excuse for being weary. It is hard work to sow on the highway, and amidst the thorns—hard work to be casting good seed upon the rock year after year. Well, if I had done so for many years, and was enabled by the Holy Ghost, I would say to myself, “I shall not give up my work because I have not yet received a recompense in it, for I perceive that in the Lord's parable three sowings did not succeed, and yet the one piece of good ground paid for all. Perhaps I have gone through my three unsuccessful sowings, and now is my time to enjoy my fourth, in which the seed will fall upon good ground.” It is a pity, dear brother, when you have had some years of rough work, to give all up *now*. Why, now you are going to enjoy the sweets of your former labour. It would be a pity, my dear sister, just when you have mastered your class, and prepared the way for a blessing, for you to run away from it. There is so much less of difficulty for you to overcome by as much as you have already overcome. He who has passed so many miles of a rough voyage will not have to go over those miles again: do not let him think of going back. To go back, indeed, in this pilgrimage were shameful: and as we have no armour for our back, it would be dangerous. Putting our hand to this plough and looking back will prove that we were unworthy of the kingdom. If there be a hundred reasons for giving up your work of faith, there are fifty thousand for going on with it. Though there are many arguments for fainting, there are far more arguments for persevering. Though we might be weary, and do sometimes feel so, let us wait upon the Lord and renew our strength, and we shall mount up with wings as eagles, forget our weariness, and be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

III. That observation brings me to the last part of my subject which is that WE HAVE ABUNDANT ENCOURAGEMENT in the prospect of reward which is afforded in the text, “In due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

The first remark upon that promise shall be—that reaping time will come. Our chief business is to glorify God by teaching the truth whether souls are saved or not ; but still I demur to the statement that we may go on preaching the gospel for years and years and even all our lifetime, and yet no result may follow. They say, “Paul *may* preach and Apollos *may* water, but God giveth the increase.” I should like them to find that passage in the Bible. In my English Bible it runs thus—“I (Paul) have planted, Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase.” There is not the slightest intent to teach us that when Paul planted and Apollos watered God would arbitrarily refuse the increase. All the glory is claimed for the Lord, but honest labour is not despised. I do not say that there is the same relation between teaching the truth and conversion as there is between cause and effect, so that they are invariably connected ; but I will maintain that it is the rule of the kingdom that they should be connected, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Some causes will not produce effects because certain obstacles intervene to prevent. A person may teach the gospel in a bad spirit : that *must* spoil it. A person may teach only part of the gospel, and he may put that the wrong way upwards. God may bless it somewhat, but yet the good man may greatly retard the blessing by the mistaken manner in which he delivers the truth. Take it as a rule that the truth of God prayed over, spoken in the fear of the Lord, with the Holy Spirit dwelling in the man who speaks it, will produce the effect which is natural to it. As the rain climbs not up to the skies, and the snow flakes never take to themselves wings to rise to heaven, so neither shall the word of God return unto him void, but it shall accomplish that which he pleases. We have not spent our strength in vain. Not a verse taught to a little girl, nor a text dropped into the ear of a careless boy, nor an earnest warning given to an obdurate young sinner, nor a loving farewell to one of the senior girls, shall be without some result or other to the glory of God. And, taking it all together as a mass, though this handful of seed may be eaten of the birds, and that other seed may die on the hard rock, yet, as a whole, the seed shall spring up in sufficient abundance to plentifully reward the sower and the giver of the seed. We know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

I do not come into this pulpit myself with any fear that I shall preach in vain. It does not occur to me that such a thing can happen. I thought so once, when I thought more of myself than now ; but now I am assured that if I speak out God’s message in the best way I can, and with much prayer leave it all with God, he will take care of it. I expect to see people converted, not because there is any good in them, but because the Lord works as he pleases, and will call whom he pleases, and will give to his own truth victory and honour. Go to your classes with this persuasion, “I shall not labour in vain, or spend my strength for nought.” “According to your faith, so be it unto you.” Take a little measure, and you shall have it filled with the manna of success, but take a great omer, and in its fulness you shall have abundance. Believe in the power of the truth you preach. Believe in the power of Christ about whom you speak. Believe in the omnipotence of the Holy Ghost, whose help you have invoked in earnest prayer. Go to your sowing, and reckon upon reaping.

I want to call your particular attention to a word in the text which is very full of encouragement. "Let *us* not be weary, for *we* shall reap." *We* shall reap. Dear brethren and sisters, we shall reap. It is not, "We shall do the work, and our successors shall reap after we are gone." We ought to be very pleased even with that, and no doubt such is often the case. But *we* shall reap too. Yes, I shall have my sheaves, and you will have yours. The plot which I have toiled and wept over shall yield me my sheaves of harvest, and I shall personally gather them. I shall reap. "I never thought much of myself as a teacher," says one, "I always fear that I am hardly competent, and I notice that the superintendent has only trusted me with the little children; but I am so glad to hear that I shall reap. I shall reap. I shall have a dear little one, saved in the Lord, to be my portion." I pray you, dear friends, if you have never reaped yet, begin to hope. You teachers who are always punctual, I mean: of course, if you do not come in time, you do not care whether you reap or not; but I speak to punctual teachers, I speak also to earnest teachers—for if you are not earnest you will never reap: you punctual, earnest, prayerful teachers shall reap. Some teachers do not go in for reaping, and they will not enjoy it. But I am speaking now to real, hard-working, earnest Sunday-school teachers who give their hearts to it, and yet have seen no results. According to the text, you shall reap. Come, my persevering comrades, let us not be discouraged: "In due season *we* shall reap," even *we*. You shall have your share with others. Though you feel as though you must give it up, you shall yet reap. After sowing all this while, do not cease from labour when reaping time is so near. If I were a farmer, if I did give up my farm, it should be before I sowed my wheat, but if I had done all the ploughing and the sowing, I should not say to my landlord, "There are six weeks and then cometh harvest, and I desire to let another tenant come in." No, no. I should want to stop and see the harvest gathered and the wheat taken to market. I should want to have my reward. So, dear brothers, wait for your recompense, specially you that have been discouraged,—“In due time we shall reap, if we faint not.” We who have thought least of our service, and perhaps have exercised least faith, and endured most searchings of heart and most groaning and crying before the Lord, we also “in due season shall reap, if we faint not.”

This harvest will come “*in due season*.” There is even among men a due season for a reward. They say, “He is a bad paymaster who pays beforehand.” So he is. You must always keep a little in hand for Saturday night, or you may miss your man before the week is ended. Sometimes our Lord keeps back his people’s reward that they may have something cheerful on before them, something also to try their mettle, and to bring out all their powers. I like to see a brave man driven into a corner, baffled and defeated, and yet resolved to overcome: then his true heroism comes out. Hear him say, “I have been working that ragged school for months, but I make no impression upon the young roughs. There is a disturbance and disorder almost every night. I do not know what to do, I am at my wit’s end; but there is one thing I know—if it is to be done it shall be done. In the name of God I will continue at work till a change is effected.” There you see the

man strengthened by the Holy Spirit to labour. That is the man who will find out how to tame the arabs. He the man who will draw teachers round him, and build up a noble school. Our true manhood often lies deep, and needs to be pursued into its den and stirred into action. When once it is thoroughly aroused it is grand to see it leap forth in passionate earnestness to achieve its purpose. I love to hear a man say, "This is impossible to men, but God will enable me." This is the triumph of faith, and blessed is he that believeth, for the due season of reaping is near for him.

The due season often is when you yourself are in a right state; when your faith has been tried, when your resolve has become fixed, when you are down on your face before God in prayer, when you are emptied out and have no strength of your own, when you go to God and cry to him alone for help, then your due season will come. The due season for harvest is not the day after the seed-sowing, but we must wait awhile and not be weary. The harvest will come as the Lord appoints. As all fruits are the sweeter for being in season, so is the reward of Christian service when it comes in God's time.

Now, lastly, when this reward comes, it will abundantly repay us.

What is the reward of Sunday-school teachers? Taking you, beloved brethren, on a broad scale, I would say that your reward lies chiefly in seeing the conversion of your children. There are a great many very excellent manuals upon the management of Sunday-schools, and I hope you will read them all, and dwell with special attention upon the prize essays; until your school is order itself. Still I have heard of beautifully managed schools from which there are very few conversions. Order may be heaven's first law, but it is not heaven's first object. Order is very desirable in a garden, but fruit is the main purpose. I know a school which is generally in a muddle, but yet children are saved in it continually. I wish it were more orderly, but yet I do not fret much about it so long as the grand result is gained. You may form so many rules and orders that you may rule your hearts out of your work: mind you do not fall into that error. Your great business is to have those children saved—systematically if you can, but saved anyhow. You must have those children convinced of sin by the Holy Spirit and led to Christ. You must not be satisfied to trim off your Sunday-school in the neatest style, unless there is real fruit unto the Lord. And what shall I say? What reward can equal the conversion of these young immortals? Is it not the highest felicity that we can enjoy on earth, next to communion with our Lord, to see these little ones saved?

Taking the Sunday-school, however, on a broad scale, I think your reward partly lies in rearing up a generation of worship-loving people. We cannot get at the great masses of London, do what we may. We shall open this house next Sunday night to all comers, but who will come? The great mass of them will be persons who have always gone to the house of prayer, but only a few of the outsiders will enter. Go into what evangelistic assembly you may, you will soon detect from the manner of the singing that the bulk of the people have been accustomed to sacred song. We do not know how to get at the great tens of thousands; but you do. You reach them while they are little, and you send them home to sing their hymns to their fathers, who will

not come and sing them here. They go and tell their mothers all about Jesus, so that the children of London are the missionaries of our city. They are Christ's heralds to the families where ministers would be totally shut out. You are training them up, and if you do this work well (and I charge you to look well to the connecting link between your senior classes and the church), if you do this work well, we shall require more places of worship, and more earnest ministers, for the people of London will take to coming to the house of prayer. When that day arrives there will be a grand time for the preachers of the word. In some villages of England, and especially in Scotland, you will scarcely find a single person absent when the house of God is open! They all go to the kirk, or to the meeting-house. Alas, it is not so in London. We have hundreds of thousands who forget the Sabbath. We have, I fear, more than a million of our fellow citizens who go so seldom to a place of worship that they may be said to be habitually absent. It will be a grand thing if you can change all this, and give us church-going millions.

And then, I believe, brethren and sisters, that to you there will be another reward, namely, that of saturating the whole population with religious truth. All children are now to be taught to read. Shall they read so as to grow up highwaymen and thieves, or shall they read so as to become servants of the living God? Very much of that must depend upon you. You will, in due subordination to all other objects, take care to introduce your children to interesting but sound literature. Your boys must read, and if you are the teacher of a boy who reads "Jack Sheppard" you will be sadly to blame if he continues to delight in such an abomination. I trust that your heaven will leaven the whole lump of our country; that you will be the means of improving the moral tone of society, and as generation follows generation I trust we shall see a nation bright with religious knowledge, devout with religious thought, and in all things exalted by justice and truth. What an army you are here to-night! May your Captain come into the midst of you, and, as he reviews you, may he cast a look of love into the heart of every one of you, and cheer you and send you away invigorated.

I am delighted to have had the opportunity of speaking this word to you, feeble though it be, for God may make it powerful by his Spirit. Go, beloved, and train these children well. You have undertaken the work, be faithful in the discharge of it. It is worth doing well, for so much depends upon it. If you do it badly, the results will accuse you throughout eternity. Go, and teach with all your heart, and soul, and might. Be not weary. Be not slack. Your reaping time is coming. The next generation will even more than the present show what you have been doing, and the next, and the next will each more fully declare it, till this blessed island, first gem of the sea, shall shine as a very Koh-i-noor in the diadem of Christ.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xiii. 1—23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—676, 126, 674.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A ROUND OF DELIGHTS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 11TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."—Romans xv. 13.

THIS is one of the richest passages in the Word of God. It is so full of instruction that I cannot hope to bring out even so much as a tithe of its teaching. The apostle desired for the Roman Christians that they might be in the most delightful state of mind, that they should be filled with joy and peace, and that this should lead on to yet further expectations, and create an abundance of hope in their souls. See, dear friends, the value of prayer, for if Paul longs to see his friends attain the highest possible condition, he prays for them. What will not prayer do? Whatsoever thou desirest for thyself, or for another, let thy desire be prepared like sweet spices and compounded into a supplication, and present it unto God, and the benediction will come.

I gather, also, from Paul's making this state of happiness a subject of request unto God, that it is possible for it to be attained. We may be filled with joy and peace in believing, and may abound in hope. There is no reason why we should hang our heads and live in perpetual doubt. We may not only be somewhat comforted, but we may be full of joy; we may not only have occasional quiet, but we may dwell in peace, and delight ourselves in the abundance of it. These great privileges are attainable, or the apostle would not have made them the subjects of prayer. Ay, and they are possible for us, as the meaning of the Epistle to the Romans was not exhausted upon the Romans, so this text belongeth to us also; and the words before us still rise to heaven as the prayer of the apostle for us, upon whom the ends of the earth are come, that we also may be filled with joy and peace, and abound in hope through the Holy Ghost. The sweetest delights are still grown in Zion's gardens, and are to be enjoyed by us; and shall they be within our reach and not be grasped? Shall a life of joy and peace be attainable, and shall we miss it through unbelief? God forbid. Let us, as
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believers, resolve that whatsoever of privilege is to be enjoyed we will enjoy it ; whatsoever of lofty experience is to be realized, we will, by God's gracious help, ascend to it : for we wish to know to the full the things which are freely given to us of God.

Not, however, in our own strength will we thus resolve, for this condition of faith, and joy, and peace must be wrought in us by God alone. This is clear enough in the text, for it is the God of hope who alone can fill us with joy and peace ; and yet again, our hope which is to abound will only abound through the power of the Holy Ghost. The fact that the happy condition described is sought by prayer is a plain evidence that the blessing comes from a divine source, and the prayer itself is so worded that the doctrine is prominently presented to the mind. So, brethren, while we resolve to obtain everything of privilege that is obtainable, let us set about our effort in divine power, not depending upon our resolutions, but looking for the power of the Holy Ghost and the energy of the God of hope.

I shall want you to follow me whilst I notice concerning the blessed state of fulness of joy and peace, first, *whence it comes* ; secondly, *what it is*, taking its delights in detail ; and then, thirdly, *what it leads to*. We are to be filled with joy and peace, that "we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost."

I. If there be, then, such a condition as being divinely filled with all joy and peace in believing, *WHENCE DOES IT COME?* The answer is, it comes from "the God of hope." But in order that we may see how it comes let us look a little at the chapter in which we find our text, for the connection is instructive.

To know joy and peace through believing we must begin by knowing what is to be believed, and this we must learn from holy Scripture, for there *he is revealed as the God of hope*. Unless God had revealed himself, we could not have guessed at hope, but the Scriptures of truth are windows of hope to us. Will you kindly read the fourth verse of the chapter and note how strikingly parallel it is to our text—"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." See, then, the God of hope is revealed in Scripture with the design of inspiring us with hope. If we would be filled with faith, joy, and peace, it must be by believing the truths set forth in the Scriptures. Before we have any inward ground of hope, God himself, as revealed in the Bible, must be our hope. We must not ask for joy first and then found our faith upon it, but our joy must grow out of our faith, and that must rest upon God alone. Our apostle sets us an example of how to use the Scriptures, for in this chapter he searches out the truth from Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and then places one text with another and gets a clear view of the testimony of God. What is very much to our point, he sees in those Scriptures that to us Gentiles God has of old been set forth in the Scriptures as the God of hope. Aforetime it seemed as if salvation were of the Jews and of the Jews alone, and we were shut out ; but now, on turning to the Old Testament itself, we discover that God had spoken good things concerning us before we knew him. There was always hope for the Gentiles, and though Israel perceived it not, yet patriarchs and kings and prophets full often spake

words which could not otherwise be interpreted. "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" is a promise which overleaped the bounds of Canaan. As, then, by searching the apostle found in the word of God hope for the Gentiles, so will the most heavy laden and burdened spirit discover sources of consolation if the Bible be diligently read and faithfully believed. Every promise is meant to inspire the believer with hope; therefore use it to that end. Use the written word as the source of comfort, and do not look for dreams, excitements, impressions, or feelings. Faith deals with the Scriptures and with the God of hope as therein revealed, and out of these it draws its fulness of joy and peace. Beloved, if you desire to get faith in Christ, or to increase it, be diligent in knowing and understanding the gospel of your salvation as set forth in the word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing," or by reading the word of God. How shall you believe that which you do not know? Do not at once make an effort to believe before you are instructed, but first know what God hath revealed, see how he hath displayed to you the hope of everlasting life, and then believe with all your heart the testimony of God. Every promise and word of God must be to you a foundation most sure and steadfast whereon to build your hope. Let your anchor grasp and hold to each revealed truth, whatever your feelings may be. We begin then by saying that fulness of joy and peace comes to us from the God of hope as he reveals himself in holy writ. As it is written, "Hear, and your soul shall live," so do we find that we must hear if our soul is to rejoice.

Now, it so happens that the Scriptures were not only written that the Gentiles might have hope, but that they might have joy. I ask you to notice the passages quoted by the apostle, for at least the last three of them call us to joy. Thus in verse 10, Moses saith, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people." If there be any joy for the elect nation, it is for us also who believe. If there be any joy for Israel redeemed out of Egypt, led through the Red Sea, fed with manna, and brought to the borders of Canaan, that joy is for us also; if any joy over the burnt offering, if any joy at the paschal supper, if any delight at the jubilee, all that joy may be shared by us, for thus saith the Lord, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people." Joy in their joy. Again, David saith (verse 11), "Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people." Now, where there is praise there is joy, for joy is a component element of it. They that praise the Lord aright rejoice before him. Go, ye Gentiles, when David bids you thus unite with Israel in praising God, he bids you take full possession of the joy which moves the favoured nation to magnify the Lord. Again, Isaiah says, "There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust," or, as it should be translated, "hope." Now, hope is ever the source of joy. So, then, in the Scriptures we see God is the God of hope, and on further search we see that the hope of the Gentiles permits them to rejoice with his people; in fine, we see that God himself is the hope of all those who know him, and the consequent source of joy and peace.

Again, then, I am brought to this, that, to begin with, the joy and peace which we all desire to obtain must be sought through a knowledge of the God of hope, as he is revealed to us by the Scriptures. We

must begin with that sure word of testimony whereunto we do well if we take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. There must be belief in God as revealed in the word, even though as yet we see no change within ourselves, nor any conceivable internal ground in our nature for hope or joy. Blessed is he who hath not seen and yet hath believed. He who can hang upon God without the comfort of inward experience is on the high road to being filled with joy and peace.

But the apostle in the text leads us through the Scriptures to God himself, who is personally to fill us with joy and peace; by which I understand that he is to become *the great object of our joy*. As Israel in the Red Sea triumphed in the Lord, even so do we joy in God by our Lord Jesus Christ. Like David, we say, "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy"; and with Isaiah we sing, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God." When first the Lord looked upon us through the windows of his word we began to hope; by-and-by his good Spirit caused our hoping to grow into believing, and since then, as our knowledge of the Lord has increased, our believing has risen to fulness of joy. Our God is a blessed God, so that to believe in him is to find rest unto the soul, and to commune with him is to dwell in bliss. Beloved, when you think of God, the just one, apart from Christ, you might well tremble, but when you see him in Jesus, his very justice becomes precious to you as "the terrible crystal," and you learn to build it into the foundation of your joy. The holiness of God which aforetime awed you becomes supremely attractive when you see it revealed in the person of Jesus Christ your Lord. How charming is "the glory of God in the face of Christ." As for the love of God, as you see it set forth in this book and in his Son, it inspires you with every sacred passion. As for his eternal immutability, it becomes the groundwork of your peace, for if he changes not, then all his promises will stand sure to you and to all his people from generation to generation. His power, which was once so terrible in the thunder and in the storm, now becomes delightful to you as you see it yoked to the promise that the promise may be fulfilled, and behold it concentrated in the man Christ Jesus that his purposes may be achieved. In fine, there is no attribute of God, there is no purpose of God, there is no deed of God, there is no aspect under which God is seen, but what becomes the object of the Christian's joy when he has seen him and believed in him as revealed in the Scriptures. To the believer God is his sun, his shield, his portion, his delight, his all. His soul delights herself in the Lord. At first he hoped in God, that peradventure he would smile upon him: he turned to the Scriptures, and he found there many a cheering declaration, and these he knew to be true, and therefore he believed God that he would do as he had said; and now not only has his hope become faith, but his faith has budded and blossomed and brought forth the almonds of joy and peace. You see, then, how the Lord is the author of all our holy gladness.

Our God is, however, called the God of hope, not only because he is the object of our hope, and the ground of our joy and peace, but because *he it is that worketh hope and joy in us*. No joy is worth the having unless the Lord is the beginning and the end of it, and no joy is worth receiving except it springs from hope in him. He must

breathe peace upon us, or else the storm-tossed waters of our spirit will never rest, nor is it desirable that they should, for peace without God is stupefaction, joy without God is madness, and hope without God is presumption. In true believers their hope, faith, joy, and peace are all alike of divine workmanship. Our spiritual raiment is never home-spun; we are divinely arrayed from head to foot.

This blessed name of "God of hope" belongs to the New Testament, and is a truly gospel title. Livy tells us that the Romans had a god of hope, but he says that the temple was struck by lightning, and in an after book he adds that it was burned to the ground. Exceedingly typical this of whatever of hope can come to nations which worship gods of their own making. All idol hopes must perish beneath the wrath of the Most High. The God of human nature unenlightened, or only sufficiently enlightened to discover its sin, is the God of terror; in fact, to many, the Lord is the God of despair: but when you turn to the revelation of God in Scripture, you find him to be a God whose gracious character inspires hope, and henceforth you turn away from everything else to fix your hope on God alone. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." God, in Christ Jesus, has ceased to be the dread of men, and has become their hope. Our Father and our Friend, we look for all to thee. And blessed be God, the hope which he excites is a hope worthy of him. It is a God-like hope—a hope which helps us to purify ourselves. At first we hope in God for cleansing from every sin, and then for acceptance here and hereafter. We hope for pardon through the atonement which is in Christ Jesus, and when we have it, we hope for sanctification by the Spirit. Our hope never ceases to rise higher and higher, and to receive fulfilment after fulfilment, and we know that it shall continue to do so till we rise to dwell at his right hand for ever and ever. He who graspeth this hope hath a soul-satisfying portion, for which a man might well be content to suffer a thousand martyrdoms if he might but abide in it. It is a hope which only God would have contrived for man—a hope founded in himself; a hope presented to the sons of men in Christ Jesus because his sacrifice has been presented and accepted; a hope which God alone can inspire in men, for even if they hear the gospel they do not find hope till he comes in power to their souls: a hope which always adores God, and lies low at his feet, never dreaming of being independent of him; a hope which layeth her crown at his feet, and taketh him to be her Lord for ever and ever. This is the hope which is the mother of our joy and peace, and only as it is wrought in us by the Lord can we be truly happy and restful.

II. Secondly, let us enquire, WHAT IS THIS BLESSED STATE OF MIND of which we have spoken a little? Let us look into the words. He says, "That the God of hope may fill you with all joy and peace in believing." It is a state of mind *most pleasant*, for to be filled with joy is a rare delight, reminding one of heaven.

It is, however, a state as *safe* as it is pleasant, for the man who has a joy which God gives him may be quite easy in the enjoyment of it. The best of the world's joy is but for a season; while you are enjoying it you are in fear because it will soon be over, and what then? Earth's best candles will soon burn out. The day of this world's mirth will end

in a night of misery. This thought mars and sours all fleeting joys; but the joy which God gives has no afterthought about it. It is wholesome and safe and *abiding*. We may drink our fill without being sickened, yea, revel in it without surfeit.

At the same time it is most *profitable* joy, for the more a man has of this joy the better man he will be. It will not soften him and render him effeminate, for it has a singular strengthening power about it. There is, doubtless, a tonic influence in sorrow, but holy joy is also exceedingly invigorating, for it is written, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." The more happy we can be in our God the more thoroughly will the will of Christ be fulfilled in us, for he desired that our joy might be full. The more you rejoice in God the more you will recommend true religion. The more full of delight you are, especially in trying times, the more you will glorify God. Few things are at the same time both pleasant and profitable, but holy joy and peace possess that double excellence. Fulness of spiritual joy is both the index and the means of spiritual strength. I commend this state, therefore, to you. I trust that we shall not be so unbelieving as to be afraid of heaven's own consolations, nor so unreasonable as to decline to be filled with joy and peace when they may be had by believing.

Now, notice, that it is a *state which has varieties in it*. It is joy and peace; and it may be either. Sometimes the believer is full of joy. Joy is active and expressive; it sparkles and flashes like a diamond; it sings and dances like David before the ark. To be filled with holy joy is a delicious excitement of the sweetest kind; may you often experience it, until strangers are compelled to infer that the Lord hath done great things for you. Nevertheless, the flesh is weak, and might hardly endure continuous delight, and so there comes a relief, in the lovely form of peace, in which the heart is really joyous, but after a calm and quiet manner. I have seen the ringers make the pinnacles of a church tower reel to and fro while they have made the joy bells sound out to the full, and then they have played quietly, and let the fabric settle down again. Even thus does joy strain the man, but peace comes in to give him rest. In this peace there is not much to exhilarate, not much which could fittingly be spoken out in song; but silence, full of infinite meaning, becomes the floodgate of the soul. You seek not the exulting assembly, but the calm shade and the quiet chamber. You are as happy as you were in your joy, but not so stirred and moved. Peace is joy resting, and joy is peace dancing. Joy cries hosanna before the Well-beloved, but peace leans her head on his bosom. In the midst of bereavements and sickness we may scarcely be able to rejoice, but we may be at peace. When faith cannot break through a troop with her sacred joy she stands still and sees the salvation of God in hallowed peace. We work with joy and rest with peace. What a blessing it is that when we come to die, if we cannot depart with the banners of triumphant joy all flying in the breeze, we can yet fall asleep safely in the arms of peace. How pleasant a life do they lead who are not the subjects of any very great excitement, but maintain calm and quiet communion with God. Their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. They neither soar nor sink, but keep the even tenor of their way. It is a state of mind, then, which admits of variations; and I really do not know which to choose out of its two

forms. I should not like to be without joy, and yet methinks there is something so solid about peace that I might almost give it the preference. I think I love the quiet sister the better of the two. That famous text in Isaiah—"They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" looks somewhat like an anti-climax; it would appear to place the greatest first, and then the less, and then the least; but it is not so. The mounting up with wings as eagles must always be more or less temporary: we are not eagles, and cannot always be on the wing. The Lord renews our strength like the eagles, and this shows we are not always up to the eagle mark. Well, though it is a grand thing to be able to fly, it is a better thing to be able to run; this is more like a man, involves less danger, and is more practically useful. It is good to run, but even that is not the best journey pace: it is best of all to walk, for this is a steady, persevering pace to move at. "Enoch walked with God." This is God's pace, who even when he makes clouds his chariot is described as walking upon the wings of the wind. We read of the walk of faith, and the walk of holiness, for walking is practical, and is meant for every day. You young people, I like to see you run, and I am glad to take a turn at it myself, but, after all, steady, sober, unwearied walking is the best. To walk without fainting is a high experimental attainment, and is none the less valuable because at first sight there seems nothing striking about it. Walking is the emblem of peace, and running and mounting up with wings as eagles are the emblems of joy.

But, beloved, *this blessed state is also a compound*, for we are bidden at one and the same time to receive both wine and milk—wine exhilarating with joy, and milk satisfying with peace. "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace." You shall lie down in the green pastures of delight, and be led by the still waters of quietness. Our heart may be as an ocean, gloriously casting upward its spray of joy, and lifting up its waves on high in delight, as one clappeth his hands for joy; and yet, at the same time, as down deep in the coral caverns all is still and undisturbed, so may the heart be quiet as a sleeping babe. We see no difficulty in understanding both lines of the hymn—

"My heart is resting, O my God,
I will give thanks and sing."

We rest and praise, as trees hold to the earth by their roots, and perfume the air with their bloom; as morning comes without sound of trumpet, and yet awakens the music of birds by its arising. Ours is no froth of joy; there is solid peace beneath our effervescence of delight. Happy are we to have learned how to combine two such choice things.

"Joy is a fruit that will not grow
In nature's barren soil;
All we can boast, till Christ we know,
Is vanity and toil.

"But where the Lord has planted grace,
And made his glories known,
These fruits of heavenly joy and peace
Are found, and there alone."

Now, I want you to lay stress on the next observation I am about to make, because I began with it, and wish to leave it upon your minds as the chief thought. *The joy and peace here spoken of are through believing.* You come to know the God of hope through the Scriptures, which reveal him; by this you are led to believe in him, and it is through that believing that you become filled with joy and peace. It is not by working, nor by feeling, that we become full of joy; our peace does not arise from the marks, and evidences, and experiences which testify to us that we are the sons of God, but simply from believing. Our central joy and peace must always come to us, not as an inference from the internal work of the Spirit in our souls, but from the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and the promises of God contained in the Scriptures. We must continue to look out of self to the written word wherein the Lord is set forth before us, and we must rest in God in Christ Jesus as the main basis of our hope; not depending upon any other arguments than those supplied by the Bible itself. I will show by-and-by how we shall afterwards reach to a hope which flows out of the work of the Spirit within us; but at the first, and, I think, permanently and continuously, the main ground of the surest joy and truest peace must come to us through simply believing in Jesus Christ. Beloved, I know that I have been converted, for I am sure that there is a change of heart in me; nevertheless, my hope of eternal life does not hang upon the inward fact. I rest in the external fact, that God hath revealed himself in Jesus as blotting out the sin of all his believing people, and, as a believer, I have the word of God as my guarantee of forgiveness. This is my rest. Because I am a believer in Christ Jesus, therefore have I hope, therefore have I joy and peace, since God hath declared that "he that believeth in him hath everlasting life." This joy can only safely come through believing, and I pray you, brothers and sisters, never be drifted away from child-like faith in what God hath said. It is very easy to obtain a temporary joy and peace through your present easy experience, but how will you do when all things within take a troublous turn? Those who live by feeling change with the weather. If you ever put aside your faith in the finished work to drink from the cup of your own inward sensations, you will find yourself bitterly disappointed. Your honey will turn to gall, your sunshine into blackness; for all things which come of man are fickle and deceptive. The God of hope will fill you with joy and peace, but it will only be through believing. You will still have to stand as a poor sinner at the foot of the cross, trusting to the complete atonement. You will never have joy and peace unless you do. If you once begin to say, "I am a saint; there is something good in me," and so on, you will find joy evaporate and peace depart. Hold on to your believing.

Come back to the text again, and you will find that *this joy and peace, according to Paul, are of a superlative character*, for, after his manner, Paul makes language for himself. He often manufactures a superlative by the use of the word "*all*," as here, "Fill you with *all* joy." He means with the best and highest degree of joy, with as much joy as you can hold, with the very choicest and most full of joys

in earth or in heaven. God give you the joy of joys, the light of delight, the heaven of heaven.

Then notice *the comprehensiveness* of his prayer. "All joy"; that is joy in God the Father's love, joy in God the Son's redeeming blood, joy in God the Holy Ghost's indwelling; joy in the covenant of grace, joy in the seal and witness of it, joy in the promises, joy in the decrees, joy in the doctrines, joy in the precepts, joy in everything which cometh from God, "all joy." Paul also requests for them all peace, peace with God, peace of conscience, peace with one another, peace even with the outside world, as far as peace may be. May you all have it.

And now observe the degree of joy and peace which he wishes for them—"that ye may be *filled*," and that by the God of hope himself. God alone knows our capacity and where the vacuum lies which most needs filling. A man might try to fill us and fail, but God, who made us, knows every corner and cranny of our nature, and can pour in joy and peace till every portion of our being is flooded, saturated, and overflowed with delight. I like to remember David's word, "The rain also filleth the pools," for even thus doth the Lord pour his grace upon the thirsty soil of our hearts till it stands in pools. As the sun fills the world with light, and enters into all places, even so the God of hope by his presence lights up every part of our nature with the golden light of joyous peace, till there is not a corner left for sadness or foreboding. This is Paul's prayer, and he expects its answer to come to us *through believing*, and in no other way; he does not ask for us mysterious revelations, dreams, visions, or presumptuous persuasions; he seeks for us no excitement of fanaticism nor the intoxication of great crowds and pleasing oratory, neither does he seek that we may imagine ourselves to be perfect, and all that kind of lumber, but that we may be happy through simply believing in the God of hope as he is set forth in the Bible. I take this book of God into my hands and say, "Whatsoever things are written here were written for my learning, that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures I might have hope"; I do have hope, for I believe this book, and now I feel joy and peace welling up within my soul.

Brethren, receive ye this benediction! O Lord, fulfil it in the heart of every believer before thee.

III. Now thirdly, **WHAT DOES THIS LEAD TO?** "Lead to?" says one, "Lead to, why surely it is enough in itself. What more is wanted?" When a man brings you into a chamber vaulted with diamonds and amethysts, and pearls and rubies; with walls composed of slabs of gold, and the floor made of solid pavements of silver, we should be astonished if he said, "This is a passage to something richer still." Yet the apostle directs us to this fulness of joy and peace through believing that we may by its means reach to something else,—*"that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost."* How often do great things in the Bible, like the perpetual cycles of nature, begin where they end and end where they begin. If we begin with the God of hope, we are wound up into holy joy and peace, that we may come back to hope again and to abounding in it by the power of the Holy Ghost.

First, I notice that the hope here mentioned arises, not out of pure believing, but out of the joy created in us by our having believed. Hope led to faith, faith to joy, and now joy back again to hope.

This is the story as far as I am concerned :—I began with believing. I felt nothing good within me, but I believed in what God revealed concerning himself. I saw nothing, but I believed, on the ground that God said so. I soon had joy and peace in my soul as the result of my faith, and now, because of this joy and peace, I hope and expect further blessings. Though still resting my soul upon the finished work of Jesus, yet hopes do arise from the work of the Holy Ghost within me. The God who has given me by believing to rejoice that the past is all atoned for, and who has given me peace because my sins are forgiven me for his name's sake, will not dash that joy by revoking my pardon. He who has given me joy, because he has quickened me, and has, up to this day, preserved me, will not, I am persuaded, forsake me, and suffer me to perish. Surely he will never leave me, after having done so much for me. My present joy gives me a hope, most sure and steadfast, that he will never turn his back upon me. If he did not intend to bless me in the future, he would not have done so much for me in the past, and he could not and would not be doing so much for me now.

This hope, you perceive, drinks its life at the fountain of personal experience. The first hope we ever know comes together with our simply believing the word of God, but now there arises in us an abounding of hope, which is the outgrowth of the inward life. Fear is banished now, for we have looked to the God of hope, and found acceptance in the Beloved. Now, therefore, in the chamber where fear formerly dwelt hope takes up its habitation ; azure-winged, bright-eyed hope makes its nest there, and sings to us all the day long.

The text speaks of an abounding hope, and if you consider for awhile you will see that very much hope must arise to a Christian out of his spiritual joy. If you have once been in the bosom of Jesus, and known his joy, your hope will overflow. For instance, you will argue—he has pardoned my sin, and made me to rejoice as a forgiven man : will he condemn me after all ? What meaneth the pardon if, after all, the transgressions are to be laid upon me, and I am to suffer for my sin ? The believer hath great joy because God's love is shed abroad in his soul, and he argues that if the Lord loves him so intensely now, he will not undergo a change, and remove his love. He who in love redeemed me by the blood of his Son will love me eternally, for he changes not. Is not this sound argument ? Grace enjoyed is a pledge of glory. Redeeming love is the guarantee of preserving love. Acceptance with God to-day creates a blessed hope of acceptance for ever. Faith and joy within the soul sing to one another somewhat after this fashion :—

“His smiles have freed my heart from pain,
My drooping spirits cheer'd ;
And will he not appear again
Where he has once appeared ?

“Has he not form'd my soul anew,
And caused my light to shine ;
And will he now his work undo,
Or break his word divine ?”

Perfectly assured of the Lord's goodness, the man confronts the future without fear, and in due time approaches death without dismay. Since the Lord has begun to make us like his Son we conclude that he will perfect his work, and raise us from our graves in the full image of our Redeemer. He has given us already to know something of the joy of Christ, who prayed that his joy might be fulfilled in us that our joy might be full, and therefore we are sure that we shall bask in the joy of heaven. We will, therefore, lie down in peace, and rest when our last day on earth shall come, for we shall rise with Jesus: of this we have no doubt. We shall enter into the joy of the Lord, for we have entered into it already. Thus out of peace and joy there grow the noblest of human hopes. Little enjoyment, like a weak telescope, gives us but a faint prospect, but great enjoyment is an optic glass of marvellous power, and brings great things near to us. Joy and peace are specimens of heaven's felicities, and set the soul both hoping and hungering. Having tasted of the grapes of Eshcol, we believe in the land which floweth with milk and honey, and long to rest under the boughs which bear such luscious clusters. We have seen the celestial city far away, but the light of it is so surpassing that we have longed to walk its golden streets, ay, and have felt sure of doing so ere long. He who has seen a little of the light of the morning expects the more eagerly the noonday. He who has waded into the river of joy up to the ankles, becomes eager to enter it still further, till he finds it a river to swim in, wherein the soul is borne along by a sacred current of unutterable delight. Up, ye saints, to your Pisgah of joy, for there you shall have a full view of Canaan which stretches before you, and is soon to be yours. Whatever your joy and peace may be now you ought to see at once that they are meant to be only a platform from which you are to look for something brighter and better still: ye are filled with joy and peace that ye may abound in hope.

Our apostle rightly adds, "*by the power of the Holy Ghost,*" for I take it that this is partly mentioned by way of caution, because there are hopes arising out of inward experience which may turn out to be fallacious, and therefore we must discriminate between the hope of nature and the hope of grace. I have heard young people say, "I know I am saved, because I am so happy." Be not too sure of that. Many people think themselves very happy, and yet they are not saved. The world has a happiness which is a fatal sign, and a peace which is the token of spiritual death. Discernment, therefore, is needed lest we mistake the calm before a storm for the rest which the Lord giveth to those who come unto him. Hope may arise out of our joy, but we must mind that we do not fix our confidence in it, or we shall have a sandy foundation. The solid grace of hope which abides and remains in the soul is born of faith through the word; it is only *the abounding* of hope which comes out of our joy and peace. Let me begin again with you lest there should be any mistake. You hear of the God of hope, and are led to believe in God as he is revealed in Scripture. So far all is plain sailing. If you believe in the Christ of God, you obtain joy and peace, but these are results, not causes: you must not begin with your own joy and peace, and say, "My hope of salvation is built upon the happiness I have felt of late." This will never do. Begin first of all with the

prayer of his, shows how quick he is to see anything which is in any degree favourable to the poor clients whose cause he has undertaken. He spied out in a moment the only fact upon which compassion could find foothold, and he secretly breathed out his loving heart in the cry, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Our great Advocate will be sure to plead wisely and efficiently on our behalf; he will urge every argument which can be discovered, for his eye, quickened by love, will suffer nothing to pass which may tell in our favour.

The prophet, however, does not, I suppose, intend to confine our thoughts to the one incident which is recorded by the evangelists, for the intercession of Christ was an essential part of his entire life-work. The mountain's side often heard him, beneath the chilly night, pouring out his heart in supplications. He might as fitly be called the man of prayers as "the man of sorrows." He was always praying, even when his lips moved not. While he was teaching and working miracles by day he was silently communing with God, and making supplication for men; and his nights, instead of being spent in seeking restoration from his exhausting labours, were frequently occupied with intercession. Indeed, our Lord's whole life is a prayer. His career on earth was intercession wrought out in actions. Since "he prayeth best who loveth best," he was a mass of prayer, for he is altogether love. He is not only the channel and the example of prayer, but he is the life and force of prayer. The greatest plea with God is Christ himself. The argument which always prevails with God is Christ incarnate, Christ fulfilling the law, and Christ bearing the penalty. Jesus himself is the reasoning and logic of prayer, and he himself is an ever living prayer unto the Most High.

It was part of our Lord's official work to make intercession for the transgressors. He is a Priest, and as such he brings his offering, and presents prayer on the behalf of the people. Our Lord is the Great High Priest of our profession, and in fulfilling this office we read that he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears; and we know that he is now offering up prayers for the souls of men. This, indeed, is the great work which he is carrying on to-day. We rejoice in his finished work, and rest in it, but that relates to his atoning sacrifice; his intercession springs out of his atonement, and it will never cease while the blood of his sacrifice retains its power. The blood of sprinkling continues to speak better things than that of Abel. Jesus is pleading now, and will be pleading till the heavens shall be no more. For all that come to God by him he still presents his merits to the Father, and pleads the causes of their souls. He urges the grand argument derived from his life and death, and so obtains innumerable blessings for the rebellious sons of men.

I. I have to direct your attention this morning to our ever-living Lord making intercession for the transgressors; and as I do so I shall pray God, in the first place, that all of us may be roused to ADMIRATION FOR HIS GRACE. Come, brethren, gather up your scattered thoughts and meditate upon him who alone was found fit to stand in the gap and turn away wrath by his pleading. If you will consider his intercession for transgressors I think you will be struck with the love, and tenderness, and graciousness of his heart, when you recollect that *he offered intercession*

verbally while he was standing in the midst of their sin. Sin heard of and sin seen are two very different things. We read of crimes in the newspapers, but we are not at all so horrified as if we had seen them for ourselves. Our Lord actually saw human sin, saw it unfettered and unrestrained, saw it at its worst. Transgressors surrounded his person, and by their sins darted ten thousand arrows into his sacred heart, and yet while they pierced him he prayed for them. The mob compassed him round about, yelling, "Crucify him, crucify him," and his answer was "Father, forgive them": he knew their cruelty and ingratitude, and felt them most keenly, but answered them only with a prayer. The great ones of the earth were there, too, sneering and jesting—Pharisee and Sadducee and Herodian—he saw their selfishness, conceit, falsehood, and bloodthirstiness, and yet he prayed. Strong bulls of Bashan had beset him round, and dogs had compassed him, yet he interceded for men. Man's sin had stirred up all its strength to slay God's love, and therefore sin had arrived at its worst point, and yet mercy kept pace with malice, and outran it, for he sought forgiveness for his tormentors. After killing prophets and other messengers, the wicked murderers were now saying, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours." And yet that heir of all things, who might have called fire from heaven upon them, died crying, "Father, forgive them." He knew that what they did was sin, or he would not have prayed "forgive them," but yet he set their deed in the least unfavourable light, and said, "they know not what they do." He set his own sonship to work on their behalf, and appealed to his Father's love to pardon them for his sake. Never was virtue set in so fair a frame before, never goodness came so adorned with abundant love as in the person of the Lord Jesus, and yet they hated him all the more for his loveliness, and gathered round him with the deeper spite because of his infinite goodness. He saw it all, and felt the sin as you and I cannot feel it, for his heart was purer, and therefore tenderer than ours: he saw that the tendency of sin was to put him to death, and all like him, yea and to slay God himself if it could achieve its purpose, for man had become a Deicide and must needs crucify his God—and yet, though his holy soul saw and loathed all this tendency and atrocity of transgression, he still made intercession for the transgressors. I do not know whether I convey my own idea, but to me it seems beyond measure wonderful that he should know sin so thoroughly, understand its heinousness, and see the drift of it, and feel it so wantonly assailing himself when he was doing nothing but deeds of kindness; and yet with all that vivid sense of the vileness of sin upon him, even there and then he made intercession for the transgressors, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Another point of his graciousness was also clear on that occasion, namely, that he should *thus intercede while in agony*. It is marvellous that he should be able to call his mind away from his own pains to consider their transgressions. You and I, if we are subject to great pains of body, do not find it easy to command our minds, and especially to collect our thoughts and restrain them, so as to forgive the person inflicting the pain, and even to invoke blessings on his head. Remember that your Lord was suffering while he made intercession, beginning to suffer the pangs of death, suffering in soul as well as in body,

for he had freshly come from the garden, where his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Yet in the midst of that depression of spirit, which might well have made him forgetful of the wretched beings who were putting him to death, he forgets himself, and he only thinks of them, and pleads for them. I am sure that we should have been taken up with our pains even if we had not been moved to some measure of resentment against our tormentors; but we hear no complaints from our Lord, no accusations lodged with God, no angry replies to them such as Paul once gave—"God shall smite thee, thou whited wall"; not even a word of mourning or of complaining concerning the indignities which he endured, but his dear heart all ascended to heaven in that one blessed petition for his enemies, which there and then he presented to his Father.

But I will not confine your thoughts to that incident, because, as I have already said, the prophet's words had a wider range. To me it is marvellous *that he, being pure, should plead for transgressors at all*: for you and for me amongst them—let the wonder begin there. Sinners by nature, sinners by practice, wilful sinners, sinners who cling to sin with a terrible tenacity, sinners who come back to sin after we have smarted for it; and yet the Just One has espoused our cause, and has become a suitor for our pardon. We are sinners who omit duties when they are pleasures, and who follow after sins which are known to involve sorrow: sinners, therefore, of the most foolish kind, wanton, wilful sinners, and yet he who hates all sin has deigned to take our part, and plead the causes of our souls. Our Lord's hatred of sin is as great as his love to sinners; his indignation against everything impure is as great as that of the thrice holy God who revengeth and is furious when he comes into contact with evil; and yet this divine Prince, of whom we sing, "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness," espouses the cause of transgressors, and pleads for them. Oh, matchless grace! Surely angels wonder at this stretch of condescending love. Brethren, words fail me to speak of it. I ask you to adore!

Further, it is to me a very wonderful fact that *in his glory he should still be pleading for sinners*. There are some men who when they have reached to high positions forget their former associates. They knew the poor and needy friend once, for, as the proverb hath it, poverty brings us strange bedfellows, but when they have risen out of such conditions they are ashamed of the people whom once they knew. Our Lord is not thus forgetful of the degraded clients whose cause he espoused in the days of his humiliation. Yet though I know his constancy I marvel and admire. The Son of man on earth pleading for sinners is very gracious, but I am overwhelmed when I think of his interceding for sinners now that he reigns yonder, where harps unnumbered tune his praise and cherubim and seraphim count it their glory to be less than nothing at his feet, where all the glory of his Father is resplendent in himself, and he sitteth at the right hand of God in divine favour and majesty unspeakable. How can we hear without amazement that the King of kings and Lord of lords occupies himself with caring for transgressors—caring indeed for you and me. It is condescension that he should commune with the blood-washed before his throne, and allow the perfect spirits to be his companions, but that his heart should steal away from all heaven's felicities

to remember such poor creatures as we are and make incessant prayer on our behalf, this is like his own loving self—it is Christlike, Godlike. Methinks I see at this moment our great High Priest pleading before the throne, wearing his jewelled breastplate and his garments of glory and beauty, wearing our names upon his breast and his shoulders in the most holy place. What a vision of incomparable love! It is a fact, and no mere dream. He is within the holy of holies, presenting the one sacrifice. His prayers are always heard, and heard for us, but the marvel is that the Son of God should condescend to exercise such an office and make intercession for transgressors. This matchless grace well nigh seals my lips, but it opens the floodgates of my soul, and I would fain pause to worship him whom my words fail to set forth.

Again, it is gloriously gracious *that our Lord should continue to do this*; for lo, these eighteen hundred years and more he has gone into his glory, yet hath he never ceased to make intercession for transgressors. Never on heaven's most joyous holiday when all his armies are marshalled, and in their glittering squadrons pass in review before the King of kings, has he forgotten his redeemed ones. The splendours of heaven have not made him indifferent to the sorrows of earth. Never, though, for aught we know, he may have created myriads of worlds, and though assuredly he has been ruling the courses of the entire universe, never once, I say, has he suspended his incessant pleading for the transgressors. Nor will he, for the holy Scriptures lead us to believe that as long as he lives as mediator he will intercede: "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." He lived and lives to intercede, as if this were the express object of his living. Beloved, as long as the great Redeemer lives and there is a sinner still to come to him, he will still continue to intercede. Oh, my Master, how shall I praise thee! Hadst thou undertaken such an office now and then, and hadst thou gone into the royal presence once in a while to intercede for some special cases, it would have been divinely gracious on thy part, but that thou shouldst always be a suppliant, and never cease to intercede, surpasses all our praise. Wonderful are his words as written in prophecy by Isaiah,—“For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.” As the lamp in the temple went not out, so neither hath our Advocate ceased to plead day nor night. Unwearied in his labour of love, without a pause he has urged our suit before the Father's face. Beloved, I will not enlarge, I cannot, for adoration of such love quite masters me; but let your hearts be enlarged with abounding love to such an intercessor as this, who made, who does make, and who always will make intercession for the transgressors. I have said, “*will make*,” and indeed this is no bare assertion of mine, for my text may be read in the future as well as in the past: indeed, as you will perceive upon a little thought, it must have been meant to be understood in the future, since the prophecy was written some seven hundred years before our Lord had breathed his intercessory prayer at the cross: although the prophet, in order to make his language pictorial and vivid, puts it in the past tense, it was actually in the future to him, and therefore we cannot err in reading it

in the future, as I have done—"he *shall* make intercession for the transgressors." Constant love puts up a ceaseless plea. Endless compassion breathes its endless prayer. Till the last of the redeemed has been gathered home that interceding breath shall never stay, nor cease to prevail.

II. Thus have I called you to feel admiration for his grace ; and now, secondly, I do earnestly pray that we may be led of the Holy Ghost so to view his intercession for transgressors as to put our **CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF**. There is ground for a sinner's confidence in Christ, and there is abundant argument for the believer's complete reliance in him, from the fact of his perpetual intercession.

Let me show you this first, because, beloved, *his intercession succeeds*. God heareth him, of that we do not doubt ; but what is the basis of this intercession ? For whatever that is, seeing it makes the intercession to be successful, we may safely rest on it. Read carefully the verse : "Because he hath poured out his soul unto death : and he was numbered with the transgressors ; and he bare the sin of many." See, then, the success of his plea arises out of his substitution. He pleads and prevails because he has borne the sin of those for whom he intercedes. The main stay and strength of his prevalence in his intercession lies in the completeness of the sacrifice which he offered when he bore the sin of many. Come, then, my soul, if Christ's prayer prevails because of this, so will thy faith. Resting on the same foundation, thy faith will be equally secure of acceptance. Come, my heart, rest thou on that truth—"he bare the sin of many." Throw thyself with all thy sin upon his substitution and feel that this is a safe resting-place for thy believing, because it is a solid basis for thy Lord's intercession. The perfect sacrifice will bear all the strain which can possibly come upon it ; test it by the strongest faith and see for thyself ; plead it with the boldest requests and learn its boundless prevalence. Thou mayest urge the plea of the precious blood with the Father, seeing the Lord Jesus has urged it, and has never failed.

Now, again, *there is reason for transgressors to come and trust in Jesus Christ, seeing he pleads for them*. You need never be afraid that Christ will cast you out when you can hear him pleading for you. If a son had been disobedient and had left his father's house, and were to come back again, if he had any fear about his father's receiving him, it would all disappear if he stood listening at the door and heard his father praying for him. "Oh," saith he, "my coming back is an answer to my father's prayer, he will gladly enough receive me." Whenever a soul comes to Christ it need have no hesitancy, seeing Christ has already prayed for it that it might be saved. I tell you, transgressors, Christ prays for you when you *do not* pray for yourselves. Did he not say of his believing people, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" ? Before his elect become believers they have a place in his supplications. Before you know yourselves to be transgressors and have any desire for pardon, while as yet you are lying dead in sin, his intercession has gone up even for such as you are. "Father, forgive them" was a prayer for those who had never sought forgiveness for themselves. And when you *dare not* pray for yourselves *he is still* praying for you : when under a sense of sin you dare not lift

so much as your eyes towards heaven, when you think "Surely it would be in vain for me to seek my heavenly Father's face," he is pleading for you. Ay, and when you *cannot* plead, when through deep distress of mind you feel choked in the very attempt to pray, when the language of supplication seems to blister your lip because you feel yourself to be so unworthy, when you cannot force even a holy groan from your despairing heart, he stills pleads for you. Oh what encouragement this ought to give you. If *you* cannot pray *he* can, and if you feel as if your prayers must be shut out, yet his intercession cannot be denied. Come and trust him! Come and trust him! He who pleads for you will not reject you: do not entertain so unkind a thought, but come and cast yourself upon him. Hath he not said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"? Venture upon the assured truth of that word, and you will be received into the abode of his love.

I am sure too that if Jesus Christ pleads for transgressors as transgressors, while as yet they have not begun to pray for themselves, *he will be sure to hear them when they are at last led to pray*. When the transgressor becomes a penitent, when he weeps because he has gone astray, let us be quite sure that the Lord of mercy who went after him in his sin will come to meet him now that he returns. There can be no doubt about that. I have known what it is to catch at this text when I have been heavy in heart. I have seen my sinfulness, and I have been filled with distress, but I have blessed the Lord Jesus Christ that he makes intercession *for the transgressors*, for then I may venture to believe that he intercedes for me, since I am a transgressor beyond all doubt. Then again, when my spirit has revived, and I have said, "But yet I am a child of God, and I know I am born from above," then I have drawn a further inference,—if he makes intercession for transgressors then depend upon it he is even more intent upon pleading for his own people. If he is heard for those who are out of the way, assuredly he will be heard for those who have returned unto the shepherd and bishop of their souls. For them above all others he will be sure to plead, for he lives to intercede for all who come unto God by him.

In order that our confidence may be increased, *consider the effect of our Lord's intercession for transgressors*. Remember, first, that many of the worst of transgressors have been *preserved in life* in answer to Christ's prayer. Had it not been for his pleading they would have been dead long ago. You know the parable of the fig tree that cumbered the ground, bearing no fruit, and impoverishing the soil. The master of the vineyard said, "Cut it down," but the vine dresser said, "Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well." Need I say who he is that stays the axe which else had long ago been laid at the root of the barren tree? I tell you ungodly men and women that you owe your very lives to my Lord's interference on your behalf. You did not hear the intercession, but the great owner of the vineyard heard it, and in answer to the gracious entreaties of his Son he has let you live a little longer. Still are you where the gospel can come at you, and where the Holy Spirit can renew you? Is there no ground for faith in this gracious fact? Can you not trust in him through whose instrumentality you are yet alive? Say to your heavenly Father,

“Lord, and am I yet alive,
Not in torments, not in hell!
Still doth thy good Spirit strive—
With the chief of sinners dwell?”

And then believe in him to whose pleading you owe the fact that you are within reach of mercy. Well doth it become you to confide in him who has already been your preserver from death and hell. May the divine Spirit teach you the reasonableness of my argument, and lead you at once to humble faith in Jesus.

Remember next, that *the gift of the Holy Spirit* which is needful for the quickening of transgressors was the result of Christ's intercession. Our poet was right when he said :—

“’Tis by thine interceding breath
The Spirit dwells with men.”

I do not doubt but that between the prayer of Christ for his murderers and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost there was an intimate connection. As the prayer of Stephen brought Saul into the church and made him an apostle, so the prayer of Christ brought in three thousand at Pentecost to become his disciples. The Spirit of God was given “to the rebellious also” in answer to the pleadings of our Lord. Now, it is a great blessing thus to have the Spirit of God given to the sons of men, and if this comes through Jesus' prayers let us trust in him, for what will not come if we rely upon his power? Upon sinners he will still display his power; they will be pricked in their hearts, and will believe in him whom they have pierced.

It is through Christ's intercession that *our poor prayers are accepted with God*. John, in the Revelation, saw another angel standing at the altar, having a golden censer, to whom there was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. Whence comes the much incense? What is it but Jesus' merits? Our prayers are only accepted because of his prayers. If, then, the intercession of Christ for transgressors has made the prayers of transgressors to be accepted, let us without wavering put our trust in him, and let us show it by offering our supplications with a full assurance of faith, and an unstaggering confidence in the promise of our covenant God. Are not all the promises yea and amen in Christ Jesus? Let us remember him, and ask in faith, nothing wavering.

It is through the prayers of Christ, too, that we are *kept in the hour of temptation*. Remember what he said to Peter, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not,” when Satan desired to have him and sift him as wheat. “Father, keep them from the evil” is a part of our Lord's supplication, and his Father hears him always. Well, if we are kept in the midst of temptation from being destroyed because Christ pleads for us, let us never fear to trust ourselves in his kind, careful hands. He can keep us, for he has kept us. If his prayers have delivered us out of the hand of Satan, his eternal power can bring us safely home, though death lies in the way.

Indeed, it is because he pleads *that we are saved at all*. He is “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he

ever liveth to make intercession for them." This, also, is one grand reason why we are able to challenge all the accusations of the world and of the devil, for "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Satan's charges are all answered by our Advocate. He defends us at the judgment seat when we stand there like Joshua in filthy garments, accused of the devil; and therefore the verdict is always given in our favour—"Take away his filthy garments from him." Oh ye that would bring slanderous accusations against the saints of God, they will not damage us in the court of the great King, for "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Think, my dear brethren and sisters, of what the intercession of Jesus has done, and you will clearly perceive great inducements to place your sole reliance in your Lord. You who have never trusted him, will you not this very morning begin to do so? Come, weary heart, take the Lord Jesus to be your confidence,—what more do you want? Can you desire a better friend than he is, a more prevalent advocate before the throne? Come, leave all other trusts, and yield yourselves to him this morning. I pray you accept this advice of love. And you, ye saints, if you are foolish enough to have doubts and fears, come, see how Jesus pleads for you. Give him your burden to bear, leave with him your anxieties at this moment that he may care for you. He will carry on your suit before the eternal throne, and carry it through to success. He who engages a solicitor to manage his legal business among men leaves his affairs in his hands, and he who has such a pleader before God as Christ Jesus, the Wonderful, Counsellor, has no need to torment himself with anxieties. Rather let him rest in Jesus, and wait the result with patience.

"Give him, my soul, thy cause to plead,
Nor doubt the Father's grace."

So much, then, for the duty of exercising confidence in him. May the Holy Ghost fill you with faith and peace.

III. And now, in the third place, I pray that our text may inspire us with the spirit of OBEDIENCE TO HIS EXAMPLE. I say obedience to his example, for I take the example of Christ to be an embodied precept as much binding upon us as his written commands. The life of Christ is a precept to those who profess to be his disciples. Now, brethren in Christ, may I put a few practical matters before you, and will you endeavour by the help of God's Spirit to carry them out?

First, then, your Lord makes intercession for the transgressors, therefore *imitate him by forgiving all transgressions against yourself*. Have any offended you? Let the very recollection of the offence as far as possible pass from your minds, for none have ever injured you as men injured him; let me say, as you yourself have injured him. They have not nailed you to a cross, nor pierced your hands, and feet, and side; yet if *he* said, "Father, forgive them," well may you say the same. Ten thousand talents did you owe? Yet he forgave you all that debt, not without a grievous outlay to himself: your brother owes you but a hundred pence, will you take him by the throat? Will you not rather freely forgive him even to seventy times seven? Can you not forgive him? If you

find it to be impossible I will not speak to you any longer as a Christian, because I must doubt if you are a believer at all. The Lord cannot accept you while you are unforgiving, since he himself says, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." If peace be not made thou wilt not be accepted. God hears not those in whose hearts malice and enmity find a lodging. Yet I would speak to thee in tones of love rather than with words of threatening: as a follower of the gentle Christ I beseech thee imitate him in this, and thou shalt find rest and comfort to thine own soul. From the day in which Christ forgiveth thee rise to that nobility of character which finds a pleasure in forgiving all offences fully and frankly for Christ's sake. Surely, the atonement which he offered, if it satisfied God, may well satisfy thee, and make amends for the sin of thy brother against thee as well as against the Lord. Jesus took upon himself the transgressions of the second table of the law, as well as of the first, and wilt thou bring a suit against thy brother for the sin which Jesus bore? Brethren, ye must forgive, for the blood has blotted the record! Let these words of Scripture drop upon your hearts like gentle dew from heaven,—“Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

Next, imitate Christ, dear friends, *in pleading for yourselves*. Since you are transgressors, and you see that Jesus intercedes for transgressors, make bold to say, “If he pleads for such as I am, I will put in my humble petition, and hope to be heard through him. Since I hear him cry, ‘Father, forgive them,’ I will humbly weep at his feet, and try to mingle my faint and trembling plea with his all-prevalent supplication.” When Jesus says, “Father, forgive them,” it will be your wisdom to cry, “Father, forgive me.” Dear hearer, that is the way to be saved. Let thy prayers hang, like the golden bells, upon the skirts of the great High Priest; he will carry them within the veil, and make them ring out sweetly there. As music borne on the breeze is heard afar, so shall thy prayers have a listener in heaven because Jesus wafts them there. Since thy prayers are feeble, yoke them to the omnipotence of his intercession: let his merits be as wings on which they may soar, and his power as hands with which they may grasp the priceless boons. What shall I say to those who refuse to pray when they have such an encouragement as the aid of Jesus? Tones of tenderness are suitable when addressing the ungodly, when we would persuade them to pray; but if they refuse the intercession of Jesus Christ himself, then must we add our solemn warnings. If you perish, your blood be on your own heads: we must say Amen to your condemnation, and bear witness that you deserve to be doubly punished. Rejecters of great mercy must expect great wrath. The intercession of your Saviour, when refused, will be visited upon you most terribly in the day when he becomes your judge.

Let us imitate our Lord in a third point, dear friends: namely, if we have been forgiven our transgressions, *let us now intercede for transgressors*, since Jesus does so. He is the great example of all his disciples, and, if he makes it his constant business to supplicate for sinners, should not his people unite with him? Therefore would I stir up your

pure minds by way of remembrance, to come together in your hundreds, and in your thousands, to pray. Never let our prayer-meetings decline. Let us, as a church, make intercession for transgressors, and never rest from seeking the conversion of all around us. I trust that every day, so often as you bow the knee for yourselves, you will make intercession for the transgressors. Poor things, many of them are sinning against their own souls, but they know not what they do. They think to find pleasure in sin: in this also they know not what they do. They break the Sabbath, they despise the sanctuary, they reject Christ, they go downward to hell with mirth, singing merry glees as if they were going to a wedding feast: they know not what they do. But you do know what they are doing. By your humanity—scarcely shall I need to urge a stronger motive,—I say, by mere humanity, I beseech you, do all you can for these poor souls, and especially pray for them. It is not much you are asked to do; you are not pointed to the cross and bidden to bleed there for sinners, you are but asked to make intercession. Intercession is an honourable service; it is an ennobling thing that a sinner like yourself should be allowed to entreat the King for others. If you could have permission to frequent the Queen's courts you would not think it a hardship to be asked to present a petition for another; it would be to you a delight to be enjoyed, a privilege to be snatched at eagerly, that you should be permitted to present requests for others. Oh, stand where Abraham stood and plead for sinners: Sodom could scarce be worse than many portions of the world at this hour. Plead, then, with all your hearts. Plead again, and again, and again with the Lord, though ye be but dust and ashes, and cease not till the Lord say, "I have heard the petition, I will bless the city, I will save the millions, and my Son shall be glorified."

I have not quite done, for I have a further duty to speak of, and it is this; let us take care, dear friends, that if we do plead for others *we mix with it the doing of good to them*, because it is not recorded that he made intercession for transgressors until it is first written, "he bare the sin of many." For us to pray for sinners without instructing them, without exerting ourselves to arouse them, or making any sacrifice for their conversion, without using any likely means for their impression and conviction, would be a piece of mere formality on our part. According to our ability we must prove the sincerity of our petitions by our actions. Prayer without effort is falsehood, and that cannot be pleasing to God. Yield up yourselves to seek the good of others, and then may you intercede with honest hearts.

Lastly, *if Christ appears in heaven for us, let us be glad to appear on earth for him*. He owns us before God and the holy angels, let us not be ashamed to confess *him* before men and devils. If Christ pleads with God for men, let us not be backward to plead with men for God. If he by his intercession saves us to the uttermost, let us hasten to serve him to the uttermost. If he spends eternity in intercession for us, let us spend our time in intercession for his cause. If he thinks of us, we ought also to think of his people, and especially supplicate for his afflicted. If he watches our cases, and adapts his prayers to our necessities, let us observe the needs of his people, and plead for them with understanding. Alas, how soon do men weary of pleading for our Lord. If a whole day is set

apart for prayer and the meeting is not carefully managed it readily becomes a weariness of the flesh. Prayer-meetings very easily lose their flame and burn low. Shame on these laggard spirits and this heavy flesh of ours, which needs to be pampered with liveliness and brevity, or we go to sleep at our devotions. "For ever" is not too long for *him* to plead, and yet an hour tries us here. On, and on, and on through all the ages, still his intercession rises to the throne, and yet we flag and our prayers are half dead in a short season. See, Moses lets his hands hang down, and Amelek is defeating Joshua in the plain! Can we endure to be thus losing victories and causing the enemy to triumph? If your ministers are unsuccessful, if your labourers for Christ in foreign lands make little headway, if the work of Christ drags, is it not because in the secret place of intercession we have but little strength? The restraining of prayer is the weakening of the church. If we aroused ourselves to lay hold upon the covenant angel and resolutely cried, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," we should enrich ourselves and our age. If we used more of the strong reasons which make up the weapon of all-prayer, our victories would not be so few and far between. Our interceding Lord is hindered for lack of an interceding church; the kingdom comes not because so little use is made of the throne of grace. Get ye to your knees, my brethren, for on your knees ye conquer. Go to the mercy-seat and remain there. What better argument can I use with you than this—Jesus is there, and if you desire his company you must oftentimes resort thither? If you want to taste his dearest, sweetest love, do what he is doing: union of work will create a new communion of heart. Let us never be absent when praying men meet together. Let us make a point of frequenting assemblies gathered for prayer, even if we give up other occupations. While we live let us be above all things men of prayer, and when we die, if nothing else can be said of us, may men give us this epitaph, which is also our Lord's memorial—"He made intercession for the transgressors." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah liii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—327, 412, 329.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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SINS OF IGNORANCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 25TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him."—Leviticus v. 17, 18.

It is supposed in our text that men might commit forbidden things without knowing it; nay, it is not merely supposed, but it is taken for granted, and provided for. The Levitical law had special statutes for sins of ignorance, and one of its sections begins with these words, "If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord." If you will at your leisure read the fourth and fifth chapters of Leviticus you will find it first of all supposed that *a priest* may sin. They know nothing of infallible priests and infallible popes under the Mosaic law; but it was known and recognised that priests might sin, and sin through ignorance, too. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge," but as they were compassed with infirmities, they learned to have compassion on the ignorant by being made themselves conscious that they were not perfect in understanding. In the fourth chapter a sacrifice is prescribed for "the priest that is anointed, if he do sin according to the sin of the people." The highest in office, who ought to be best read in the things of God, might nevertheless err through misunderstanding, forgetfulness, or ignorance. The priests were teachers, but they needed also to be taught. As Trapp says, "The sins of teachers are teachers of sins," and therefore they were not overlooked, but had to be expiated by trespass offerings. Further on in the chapter it is supposed that *a ruler* may sin (see verse 22). A ruler should be thoroughly acquainted with the law which he has to dispense, but yet he might not know every point, and therefore might err; therefore it is written, "When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord his God concerning things which

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should not be done, and is guilty; or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering." There existed no fiction among the Jews that the king can do no wrong: however excellent his intentions, he might be misinformed upon the divine law, and so fall into error. Errors in leaders are very fruitful of mischief, and therefore they were to be repented of and put away by an expiatory sacrifice. It was also according to the law regarded as very likely that any man might fall into sins of ignorance, for in chapter iv., verse 27, we read, "And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord." The sin even of the commonest person was not to be winked at and passed over as a mere trifle, even though he could plead ignorance of the law. It was not to be said, "Oh, he is quite an insignificant person, and he did it in error, and therefore there is no need to take any note of it"; but, on the contrary, he was also to bring his trespass offering that the priest might make an atonement for him. Ignorance was common enough among the common people, and yet it did not constitute a license for them, nor screen them from guilt.

But we need not, dear friends, go to these Scripture references, for we are well assured by our own observation and the verdict of our own experience that sins of ignorance are possible, for we have often ourselves sinned in this fashion, and we have had deeply to mourn over the fact when we have been convinced of it. Very much in which we once allowed ourselves we would not do again, for we see the evil of it, though once we judged it to be right enough. An enlightened conscience mourns over sins of ignorance, which it would never do if they were innocent mistakes.

The word rendered "ignorance" may also bear the translation of *inadvertence*. Inadvertence is a kind of acted ignorance: a man frequently does wrong for want of thought, through not considering the bearing of his action, or even thinking at all. He carelessly and hastily blunders into the course which first suggests itself, and errs because he did not study to be right. There is very much sin of this kind committed every day. There is no intent to do wrong, and yet wrong is done. Culpable neglect creates a thousand faults. "Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart." Sins of inadvertence, therefore, are undoubtedly abundant among us, and in these busy, thoughtless, railway days they are apt to increase. We do not take time enough to examine our actions: we do not take good heed to our steps. Life should be a careful work of art, in which every single line and tint should be the fruit of study and thought, like the paintings of the great master who was wont to say, "I paint for eternity"; but alas life is often slurred over like those hasty productions of the scene painter in which present effect alone is studied, and the canvas becomes a mere daub of colours hastily laid on. We seem intent to do much rather than to do well: we want to cover space rather than to reach perfection. This is not wise. O that every single thought were conformed to the will of God.

Now, seeing that there are sins of ignorance and sins of inadvertence, what about them? Is there any actual guilt in them? In our text we have the Lord's mind and judgment, not that of the church or of some eminent divine, but of the Lord God himself, and therefore let me read it to you

once again. "If a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity." Sins of ignorance, then, are really sins, needing atonement, because they involve us in guilt. Yet let us clearly understand that they greatly differ in degree of guilt from known and wilful sins. Our Lord teaches us this in the gospels, and our own conscience tells us that it must be so. The Saviour puts it, "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." He who knew not his Lord's will was less punished than the intentional offender, but still he was beaten, and beaten with stripes, of which a few will be far more than you and I may wish to bear. The fewest stripes that will come from the hand of justice will be enough to afflict us grievously. One stroke has made good men lie in the dust and moan in sorrow. Sins caused by ignorance are punished, for the prophet says (Is. v. 13), "My people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge," and again in Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Paul also tells us that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God." These are to be punished, it seems, though their sinful ignorance is mentioned in the threatening.

Yes, and according to my text, there is sin in ignorance itself, for the eighteenth verse declares, "the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred." Ignorance of the law among those who dwell in the camp of Israel is essentially sinful. The Israelite had no business to be ignorant. The law was plain and within his reach. If he neglected to study the statute, his breach of the statute could not be excused by his neglect, seeing the neglect was in itself an act of omission of a censurable kind. Wilful ignorance of the Lord's will is in itself sin, and the sin which cometh of it is grievous in the sight of the Lord our God.

Blessed be God, the solemn declaration of the text concerning the guilt of sins of ignorance need not drive us to despair, for a sacrifice was permitted for it. The offender on discovering his error might bring his offering, and pay the trespass-money for any damage which he had caused by his action; and there was a promise given in connection with the atoning sacrifice, which was no doubt often realized by the contrite in heart—"It shall be forgiven him." Be it ours this morning not to attempt excuse, but to seek forgiveness. May the Spirit of God work in us a tender-hearted confession of that sin which we did not before know to be sin, and while we are confessing it may the divine Spirit apply the precious blood that we may have a sweet sense of pardon. May the Lord make us to rejoice in the truth that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The teaching of my text does three things, of which I shall speak. First, by it *the commandment is honoured*; secondly, by it *the conscience enlightened*; thirdly, by it *the sacrifice is endeared*.

I. By the divine declaration that sins of ignorance are really sins **THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD IS HONOURED.** I need not multiply words

to prove it so. The law is by this solemn sentence lifted into a place of awful dignity. If it be really so, that to break one of its precepts involves us in guilt, even if we did not know that we were offending, then is the law indeed enthroned upon a terrible eminence and girt around with fire.

Enlarging upon this thought I would observe, first, dear friends, that *hereby the law is declared to be the supreme authority over men.* The law is supreme, not conscience. Conscience is differently enlightened in different men, and the ultimate appeal as to right and wrong cannot be to your half-blinded conscience or to mine. I might condemn what you allow, and you would scarcely tolerate what I approve: we are neither of us judges, but both alike culprits upon trial when we come under the law. The ultimate appeal will be to "Thus saith the Lord,"—to the law itself, which is the only perfect standard by which the deeds and actions of men can be measured. The law, from the supremacy into which this text lifts it, says to us, "You will not be excused because your conscience was unenlightened, nor because it was so perverse as to put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. My demands are the same in every jot and tittle, whatever your conscience may condemn or allow." Conscience has lost much of its sensitiveness through the Fall, and through our actual sins, but the law is not lowered to suit our perverted understanding. If we break the law, although our conscience may not blame us, or even inform us of the wrong, yet still the deed is recorded against us; we must bear our iniquity.

The law is also set above human opinion, for this man says, "You may do that," and a second claims that he may do the other, but the law changes not according to man's judgment, and does not bend itself to the spirit of the age or the taste of the period. It is the supreme judge, from whose infallible decision there is no appeal. Right is right though all condemn, and wrong is wrong though all approve. The law is the balance of the sanctuary, accurate to a hair, sensitive even to the small dust of the balance. Opinions continually differ, but the law is one and invariable. According to the moral sensitiveness of a man will be his estimate of the act which he performs, but would you have a law vary according to man's fickle judgment? If *you* would desire such a thing, God's infinite wisdom forbids. The law is a fixed quantity, a settled standard, and if we fall short of it, though we know it not, yet are we guilty, and must bear our iniquity unless an atonement be made.

This exalts the law above the custom of nations and periods: for men are very wont to say, "It is true I did so and so, which I could not have defended in itself; but then it is the way of the trade, other houses do so, general opinion and public consent have endorsed the custom; I do not therefore see how I can act differently from others, for if I did so I should be very singular, and should probably be a loser through my scrupulosity." Yes, but the customs of men are not the standard of right. Where they have been at first correct through strong Christian influence, the tendency is for them to deteriorate and sink below the proper standard. Habit, perpetuity, and universality of wrong, at last enable men to call the false by the same name as the true, but there is no real change wrought thereby: the customary wrong is still a wrong, the universal lie is still a falsehood. God's law is not changed: our

Lord Jesus said, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." The divine law overrides custom, tradition, and opinion: these have no more effect upon the eternal standard than the fall of a leaf upon the stars of heaven. "If a man do any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty." All the customs in the world cannot make wrong right, and if everybody that ever lived from Adam down to this hour had done a wrong thing and declared it to be righteous, yet would it make no moral difference in the evil deed. A thousand ages of whitewashing cannot make a vice a virtue. God's command standeth fast for ever, and he who breaketh it must bear his punishment. Thus you see that by the declaration of my text the law is enshrined in the place of reverence.

Note again, *if a sin of ignorance renders us guilty, what must a wilful sin do?* Do you not perceive at once how the law is again set on high by this? For if an inadvertent transgression covers the soul with guilt which cannot be put away without a sacrifice, then what shall we say of those who knowingly and advisedly, with malice aforethought, break the commands of God? What shall we say of those who, again and again and again, being often reprov'd, harden their necks and go on in their iniquities? Surely their sin is exceeding sinful. If I may become a transgressor by breaking a law which I did not know, by what name shall I be called if, when I do know it, I presumptuously lift up my hand to defy the lawgiver and violate his statutes.

Thus again, dear friends, by the teaching of our text, *men were driven to study the law*; for if they were at all right-hearted they said, "Let us know what God would have us do. We do not wish to be leaving his commands undone, or committing transgressions against his prohibitory precepts through not knowing better." They would, therefore, run to the prophets and other teachers, and ask them, "Tell us what are the statutes of the law. What hath Jehovah ordained?" and right-minded men would be led by a desire to obey, to become earnest students of the will of God; as I trust, beloved friends, we also shall be moved to be. Lest we should break the law through not knowing its commands let us make it our continual study. Let us search it day and night; let it be the man of our counsels, and the guide of our lives. Be this the prayer of each one of us. What I know not, O my God, teach thou me. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts; let me not be as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding, but enlighten me in my inmost heart, lest I ignorantly transgress thy commandments.

Thus, you see, the law was glorified in the midst of Israel, and men were led to search it, to know what the Lord required of them. A holy fear, lest they should inadvertently fall into sin, moved them to diligent reading of the commands. Thus they were often checked when about to perform a hasty deed, and were made to ask themselves, "What would the Lord have us to do?" Without such an ordinance as our text they might have acted hurriedly, and so have sinned, and sinned again, in the blundering haste of a thoughtless spirit; but by this they were checked in their heedlessness, called to consideration, and made to have the fear of God always before them. They were thereby warned to look

at their actions and examine their ways, lest through thoughtlessness they should sin against the law.

And you will see at once, beloved, that *this would lead every earnest Israelite to teach his children God's law*, lest his sons should err through ignorance or inadvertence. The pious Jew carefully taught his children all things concerning the passover and the yearly feasts, and the daily sacrifice, and the worship of the temple, and what was due to the service of God: he made him learn the moral law, and endeavoured, as far as he could, to enlighten his conscience, knowing that "for the soul to be without knowledge is not good." He said to his son, "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life." Without knowledge a man will fall into many pitfalls and snares, which the true light would have enabled him to avoid; good men, therefore, spent much of their time in training their families. "Come, ye children," they said, "hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." They were also zealous to make known the law as far as they could, saying each one to his fellow, "Know the Lord." Fear of committing sins of ignorance was a spur to national education, and tended greatly to make all Israel honour the law of the Lord.

I close these thoughts by noting that to me *the sin-revealing power of the law is wonderfully displayed* as I read my text. I know the law to be exceeding broad, I know its eye to be like that of an eagle, and I know its hand to be heavy as iron, but when I find that it accuses me of sins which I wist not, that it searches the secret parts of my soul, and brings to light what my own eye of self-examination has never seen, then am I filled with trembling. When I discover that I may stand before the bar of God charged with iniquities which I shall be quite unable to deny, but of which at this moment I am not at all conscious, then am I bowed into the dust. What a law must this be! What a light is this in which our conduct is placed! If you set your character side by side with that of your fellow man, you may begin to compliment yourself; if you look at it by the dim candlelight of public opinion, you may begin to flatter yourself; if you even go no further than a diligent search by the aid of your own judgment, you may still be somewhat at ease: but if the light in which we shall stand at last will be the light of Jehovah's own ineffable purity, if his omniscience detects iniquity where we have not perceived it, and if his justice will visit sin even where we were not cognisant of it, our position is solemn indeed. What a law is this by which men are bound! How severe and searching! How holy and how pure must God himself be? O thou thrice holy Jehovah, we are filled with awe of thee! The heavens are not clear in thy sight, and thou chargedst thine angels with folly, how then can we be just with thee? After reading this, thine own word, we see how justly thou wilt charge *us* with folly, and how impossible it is for us to hope to be justified in thy sight by any righteousness of our own. Thus, my brethren, we see that the law is honoured.

II. Secondly, by the teaching of the text, **THE CONSCIENCE IS AROUSED**. I feel when I read these words as if a great gulf opens at my feet, "If a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity." You know, dear friend,

that you are a wilful sinner, and have broken God's law consciously, but if you may be a sinner, though you wist it not, how the solid earth rolls away from under you as in a dreadful earthquake, and almost like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, you stand in dread as the devouring fire pours forth from the mysterious abyss. Nothing which is human can be thought certain after this. Think of the sins you may have committed; sins of thoughts which have too rapidly flitted through your mind for you to recollect them,—thoughts which pass over your mind as mere imaginations, like clouds floating aloft in the sky, which cast a flying shadow over the landscape and are gone. Think of your evil thoughts, your pleasure in hearing of uncleanness, your desires, wishes, and excuses of evil,—these are all iniquities. Then, too, our words, our hurried words of anger, of falsehood, of petulance, and pride: our idle words, our murmuring words, our unbelieving words, our irreverent words: words scarcely meant, which fell from us without thought: what a multitude of these may be laid to our door, and all these are full of sin! And actions in which we have excused ourselves very thoroughly, because we have never looked at them in God's light, but have been content to regard them in the dim ray of custom: are there not many of these which contain sin? When I think of all the forms of evil I am compelled to fear that much of our life may have been a continuous sin, and yet we may have never condemned ourselves, or even thought about it! Remember that great command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." How far short of that you and I have come! Mentally we have not served God to perfection, neither have the affections loved him with all possible intensity, nor has the soul with its desires gone after him so eagerly as it should. Verily, we are guilty, guilty much more than we have ever imagined. And as to that second command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"; who among us has done so? Have we loved our fellow-man with a love that even approximated to our love to ourselves? O God, amid the varied lights of thy ten commands, all comprehended in the white light of that one word "love," we stand convicted, and we perceive that our ignorance affords no covering for us! We hear thy voice and tremble before it whilst thou sayest, "Though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity."

Our ignorance, dear friends, is evidently very great. I do not suppose that the best instructed Christian here will claim to possess much wisdom. The usual rule is that the more we really know the more conscious we are of the littleness of our knowledge. Our ignorance, therefore, I may take it for granted all round, has been very great. What scope, then, has there been beneath the mantle of that mist of ignorance for sin to hide and multiply. As the conies swarm in the holes of the rock, the bats in the sunless caves of the earth, and the fish in the deep abysses of the sea, so do our sins swarm in the hidden parts of our nature. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults!"

The ignorance of very many persons is to a large degree wilful. Many do not read the Bible at all, or very seldom, and then without desiring to know its meaning. Even some professing Christians take their religion from the monthly magazine, or from some standard book written

by a human author and adopted by their sect, but few go to the Word of God itself: they are content to drink of the muddled streams of human teaching instead of filling their cups at the crystal fount of revelation itself. Now, brethren, if ye be ignorant of anything concerning God's mind and will, it is not, in the case of any of you, for want of the Book, nor for want of a willing guide to instruct you in it; for, behold, the Holy Spirit waiteth to be gracious to you in this respect. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." If we do not know, we may know it. Our ignorance has been wilful if in this privileged country we remain ignorant of the gospel. Where there is confessedly such a mass of wilful ignorance, who among us can imagine what myriads of evil shapes of sin swarm in the grim darkness? The prince of darkness holds his court in the blackness of that ignorance which we ourselves have wilfully created by refusing to come to the light. The enemy sows the seed of evil by night, and amid Egyptian darkness the accursed grain grows to an awful ripeness and brings forth a hundredfold. Break in, O light eternal! Break in upon the dimness of our ignorance, lest it thicken into the eternal midnight of hell.

Now, *it will be vain for any man to say in his mind, as I fear some will do, "God is hard in thus dealing with us."* If thou sayest thus, O man, I ask thee to remember God's answer. Christ puts your rebellious speech into the mouth of the unfaithful one who hid his talent. He said, "I knew that thou wast an austere man, gathering where thou hadst not strawed." What did his Master say? Instead of excusing himself, which it is far beneath the dignity of the great God to do, he took the man at his own confession, and he said, "Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" If you know God to be hard, or say you think so, then recollect how earnest you ought to be to come up to his standard; for, call that standard what you like, it is the standard: count it to be severe if you will, it is binding upon you for all that, and by it you will have to be tried at the last, so that there is no escape for any one of us by impeaching our Maker. Wiser far is it to submit and crave for mercy.

Let us recollect, in order that our doctrine may appear less strange, that *it is according to the analogy of nature* that when God's laws are broken, ignorance of those laws should not prevent the penalty falling upon the offenders. The natural law is an instructive type of the moral and spiritual law, and from it we may gather much teaching. Here is the law of gravitation, by which objects are attracted to each other. It is inevitable that heavy matters will fall to the earth. A man thinks that he can fly; he puts on his wings and ascends a tower; he is fully persuaded that he is about to mount like a bird. Spectators are invited to behold the wonder and expectations are excited. The law of gravitation is against the inventor, but he does not think so. Poor man, he firmly believes in his own flight, but the moment he leaps from the tower he falls to the earth and is gathered up a mangled corpse. Why did not God suspend his law because the man did not intentionally violate it? No; the law is stern, and changes not, and he who offends in ignorance pays the penalty. I have read that the Chinese at Peking often endure

severe winters; they have coal just under them, but they refuse to dig the coal for fear they should disturb the equilibrium of the earth, and cause the celestial empire, which is now at the top of the universe, to turn over to the bottom. The celestials are thoroughly conscientious in this belief, but does the weather alter to suit their philosophy? Does God make them warm in winter without coal? By no manner of means. If they refuse the means of warmth they must be cold: their ignorance does not raise the temperature so much as half a degree. A physician, with the best possible motive, endeavours to find out a new drug, that he may alleviate pain. In making his experiments he inhales a deadly gas, which he did not know to be fatal. He dies as surely as if he had wilfully taken poison. The law is not suspended to reward his benevolence and avert the fatal result of his mistake. Whatever his motives may have been, he has broken a natural law, and the appointed penalty is exacted of him. Verily, as it is in the natural so will you find it to be in the spiritual world.

But let us go into the question a little, by way of argument. *It is of necessity that it should be according to this declaration.* It is not possible that ignorance should be a justification of sin: for, first, if it did so, it would follow that the more ignorant a man was the more innocent he would be. It would then assuredly be true that ignorance is bliss, for perfect ignorance would be under no responsibilities and free from all sin. All that you and I would have to do, in order to be perfectly clear from all charge, would be to know nothing. To burn the Bible, refuse to hear the gospel, and rush away from civilization would be the nearest way to freedom from all guilt. Do you not see that if things were so, knowledge might be regarded as a curse, and that the light which Christ comes to bring into the world would be a man's most solemn affliction if it shone upon him? I protest that, in my unregenerate state, if I had been sure that ignorance would have rid me of responsibility, I would have closed every avenue of knowledge, and would have laboured to abide in darkness. But such a supposition is not to be borne: it is inconsistent with the first principles of common sense.

If, again, the guilt of an action depended entirely upon a man's knowledge, we should have no fixed standard at all by which to judge right and wrong: it would be variable according to the enlightenment of each man, and there would be no ultimate and infallible court of appeal. Suppose the statute book of our own country should be constructed on the principle that in proportion only to a man's knowing the law should be his guilt in breaking it, we should have numbers of persons truthfully pleading ignorance, and a great many more endeavouring to do so, and such a simple and easy method of obtaining acquittal would become popular at once. The art of forgetting would be diligently studied, and ignorance would become an enviable inheritance. We should have gentlemen brought up for being drunk and disorderly who had paid forty shillings and costs a score of times, who would still say that they did not know that they could be punished again since they had paid the fine so often. Ignorance would be so continually pleaded, that there would be practically an end of all law, and the very foundations of the state would be undermined. The thing cannot be endured: it is absurd upon its very face.

Moreover, ignorance of the law of God is itself a breach of law, since we are bidden to know and remember it. Thus spake the Lord by his servant Moses: "Ye shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates." Knowledge of the law was a duty and ignorance a crime. Can it be possible, then, that one sin is to be an excuse for another? It is a sin on a man's part to refuse to search into the word of God: can it be that because he commits this sin he is to be excused for the faults into which his wilful ignorance leads him? It is out of the question.

If sins of ignorance are not sins, then Christ's intercession was altogether a superfluity. You remember that our text last Sabbath morning was, "He made intercession for the transgressors," and we illustrated it by the text, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." But if there is no sin when a man does not know what he does, why did our Lord pray for pardon for ignorant transgressors? Why ask forgiveness, if there be no wrong? The correct way of putting it would have been, "Father, I do not ask thee to forgive, for there is no offence, seeing that they know not what they do"; but by the fact of his having pleaded for forgiveness it is clearly proved that there is guilt in the sin of ignorance.

The work of the Holy Spirit, too, would be an evil instead of a good work in the hearts of men, if ignorance were an excuse for sin, for he has come to convince the world of sin; but if unconvinced of sin they are innocent of it, why convince them of it? Of what use is it to quicken a conscience and to enlighten it and make it bleed over a transgression, if it would be no transgression, provided that conscience had never been made cognisant of it? Who is he that shall so blaspheme the Holy Ghost as to say that his work is needless and even idle? Sins of ignorance, therefore, must be sinful.

Look at one other consequence which would follow from the contrary doctrine. The more wicked a man is, the more hardened he becomes, and the more ignorant he grows as to the beauty of holiness. Everybody knows that. A sin which troubles a child when at home with his godly father will not trouble him at all when he gets to be fifty years of age, provided he has indulged in a course of vice. From one sin to another the man descends, and, as he descends, his mental and moral eyes grow dim, and he perceives less and less the sinfulness of sin. If a man who has arrived at the utmost pitch of infamy can commit any atrocity without the smallest idea of its being wrong, if he can cheat, and lie, and swear, and I know not what, and yet call it all nothing, and wipe his mouth; if that man is guilty of less sin because of the growing deadness of his conscience, and the limited degree of his spiritual knowledge, then verily things are turned upside down. But it is not so. The test of the guilt of an action is not a man's conscience, nor his perception of evil, nor his knowledge, but the law itself; for sin is a transgression of the law, be that law known or unknown. The statute stands immovable and

immutable, and the sinner, blind though he may be, if he fall upon it shall be broken.

Once again, I am sure that many of us now present must have *felt the truth of this in our own hearts*. You who love the Lord and hate unrighteousness, must in your lives have come to a point of greater illumination, where you have said, "I see a certain action to be wrong; I have been doing it for years, but God knows I would not have done it if I had thought it wrong. Even now I see that other people are doing it, and thinking it right; but I cannot do so any more; my conscience has at last received new light, and I must make a change at once." In such circumstances did it ever come to your mind to say, "What I have done was not wrong, because I did not know it to be wrong"? Far from it. You have justly said to yourself, "My sin in this matter is not so great as if I had transgressed wilfully with my eyes open, knowing it to be sin": but yet you have accused yourself of the fault, and mourned over it. At least I know *I have*. A man like John Newton, who in his early years had been connected with the slave trade, and thought it right, as most Christian men did in those times, did not excuse himself in his after years when his conscience was aroused to the iniquity of slavery. Do you think that the good man would say, "I was quite right in doing as I did, because everybody else did it, and I knew no better"? Ah, no. It was right or wrong whether he knew it or not, and his conscience, when it became enlightened, told him so. My conscience, and your conscience, may need to be enlightened about several matters which now we are doing complacently enough, without any notion that we are sinning: but the action bears its own character of right or wrong, whatever our judgment may be.

Does not this show us the utter impossibility of salvation by works? If you expect to be saved by keeping the law, you must be a bolder man than I dare to be. I know that I cannot keep the law of God, and the doctrine of my text makes it impossible beyond all other impossibility, because the law accuses me of doing wrong even when I do not intend it, and am not conscious of it. O you who hope to be saved by works, how can you ever enjoy a moment's peace? If you think your righteousness will save you if it is perfect, how can you ever be sure that it is perfect? You may have sinned ignorantly, and that will spoil it all. Think of this, and be dismayed. I do beseech you, believe our testimony when we assure you that the road to heaven by your own righteousness is blocked up. Ten great Krupp guns which fling, each one of them, a bolt huge enough to dash your soul to hell, stand pointed against you if you attempt to make your way to heaven by that steep ascent. There is another path: yon cross directs you to it, for it is the sign-post of the King's highway. That royal road to heaven is paved with grace: God forgives the guilty freely because they trust in Christ. That path is so safe that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon; but as for the road of legal righteousness, attempt it not, but hearken to what we have further to say unto you.

III. By the grand and awful truth of the text **THE SACRIFICE IS ENDEARED**. Just according to our sense of sin must be our value of the sacrifice. God's way of delivering those who sinned ignorantly was not by denying their sin and passing it over, but by accepting an atonement

for it. "The priest shall make an atonement concerning his sin wherein he hath erred, and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him." The forgiveness was to come through atonement. How greatly you and I need an atonement for our sins of ignorance, seeing our ignorance is great! O blood of Christ, how much we need thee! O divine Substitute, how greatly do we require thy cleansing blood!

How gracious it is on God's part to be willing to accept an atonement; for if his law had said there shall be no atonement possible, it would have been just; but infinite grace devised the plan by which, through the sacrifice of another, pardon is possible for the ignorant sinner. Behold how generous God is, for he has himself provided this sacrifice. The man who had erred under the law had to bring an offering himself, but ours is brought for us. Jesus the Son of God was not spared by the great Father, but he gave him out of his bosom that he might bleed and die. The incarnate God is the great bearer of the sin of ignorance; and to-day he can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for he has made an atonement for them.

Under the law this atonement was to be a ram without blemish. Our Lord had no sin, nor shade of sin. He is the spotless victim which the law requires. All that justice, in its most severe mood, could require from man by way of penalty our Lord Jesus Christ has rendered; for in addition to his sacrifice for the sin, he has presented a recompense for the damage, as the person who sinned ignorantly was bound to do. He has recompensed the honour of God, and he has recompensed every man whom we have injured. My brother, has another injured you? Well, since Christ has given himself to you, there is a full recompense made to you, even as there has been made to God. Blessed be his name, we may rest in this sacrifice. How supremely efficacious it is. It takes away iniquity, transgression, and sin.

My dear hearers, you are bound to confess your sins to God; but if pardon were offered you upon the condition that you should mention every sin you have committed, not one of you would ever be saved. We do not know, and if we ever did know, we cannot remember all our shortcomings, and all our transgressions; but the mercy is, though *we* do not know them, *HE* does, and he can blot them out. Though we cannot weep over them with a distinct knowledge of them, because they are not known to us, yet Jesus bled for them with a distinct knowledge of them all, and they are all put away by his unknown sufferings,—all cast into the deeps where an angel's eye can never trace them. By his agonies immense, unsearchable, endured for us, and by his merits, infinite as his divine nature, our Redeemer has taken away that thick darkness of iniquity which we were not capable of comprehending. O believing sinner, the debt thou knowest not thy glorious Surety has nevertheless borne and discharged for thee. Blessings on his name. Rest in him, and then go thy way and rejoice. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm li.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—189, 51 (Vers. III.), 564.

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GOD'S THOUGHTS AND WAYS FAR ABOVE OURS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 2ND, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."—Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

VERY often must the great truth expressed by this Scripture have forced itself upon every thoughtful mind. Though we think and are so far like to God because, being intelligent beings, we have thoughts of our own, yet our thoughts must for ever be weak and fragmentary as compared with his thoughts; and though as free agents we have ways of our own choice, in some of which we move with great show of wisdom, yet our ways are upon the earth, and cannot attain to the ways of the Lord, which are far above us. This is true as to his proceedings in providence. God's designs are vast and far-reaching, and his methods are frequently strange and inscrutable, though always wise. We have little plans to suit our little foresight and power, but his ways are unsearchable. Oftentimes he brings light of excessive brightness out of darkness more dense than usual; and produces superior joys out of extraordinary sorrows. In infinite wisdom he causes the most furious storms to cast up upon the shore the pearl of peace. He is wonderful both in counsel and in working and chooseth ever that way in which his glory is most abundantly displayed. Our way, which for a time we think to be the best, when it is scanned by the enlightened eye soon turns out to be as much beneath God's way of accomplishing the desired purpose as the earth is beneath the heavens. Compared with him our wisdom is folly, and our prudence madness. Indeed, we may not compare ourselves with the Lord, for there is no comparison: call it a contrast, and you have the word. So sublime is Providence that we do not comprehend it; so good is it that we are filled with wonder as we see its designs unfolded. We see its bright side at times and sun ourselves in the warm light thereof, and then we adore and magnify the Lord. Yet, we never knew the half of the hidden benefits which he is working out for us; nor do we suspect the Lord of a tenth of the goodness which he stores up for us. At other times we have felt the night side of providence, and have sorrowed in its chill shade;

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yea, and perhaps we have even rebelled against it; and yet at that very time the Lord's purposes have been divinely rich toward us, and the night has been the choicest season of benediction. We have not the wings of eagles on which to soar to the exceeding height of the dealings of the Lord; we walk below and look up wonderingly, as men gaze on the stars: we are sure that we are safe beneath the sublime all-covering power, but we are equally clear that the longest experience and the profoundest thought will never measure the height of the thoughts and ways of the Eternal.

The words, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways," are equally true in reference to the things of grace, for there the Lord of love has altogether left our thoughts behind. Could man have dreamed that he was the object of eternal love, and that God would assume his nature? Could we have imagined that the Almighty would give his only-begotten Son to die for guilty man? The atonement was a thought which never would have crossed man's mind if it had not first of all been revealed to him by the great Father. The divine way of lifting up the poor from the dust and the needy from the dunghill, by his rich, free, omnipotent grace, is not of man nor by man. The Lord's thought of choosing the base things of this world, and things that are not to bring to nought the things that are, his thoughts of sovereignty and thoughts of grace,—all consistent with his thoughts of justice, are far above human invention, and out of man's range of thought.

Even when the Lord explains his thoughts and ways to us, and brings them down to our comprehension as far as they can be, yet we cannot fail to wonder at their elevation and grandeur—

"Great God of wonders! all thy ways
Are matchless, Godlike, and divine."

Have you not often stood in mute astonishment as you have discovered some fresh blessing of the covenant before unknown to you? Like a miner who turns over another nugget in the mine, and stands in amazed delight, so have you mingled faith with astonishment. Have you not known what it is to do as David did when Nathan brought him tidings of the Lord's covenant with him—"Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Have not such fits of astonishment been upon you also? Have you not cried with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Hundreds of times between now and heaven will the like glad astonishment seize us, and perhaps in heaven itself wondering will be a leading part of our enjoyment. We shall—

"Sing with wonder and surprise
His lovingkindness in the skies."

Do not the victorious hosts which stand upon the sea of glass, having the harps of God, sing the song of Moses, the servant of the Lord, and of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty"? The thoughts of God will even in heaven be above our sublimest thoughts, and his ways even then above our most heavenly ways. *How exalted is the Lord!* His glory is above the earth and heavens!

How tenderly doth he overpower us with the splendour of his goodness; soothing where he might confound. In grace and love, who is like unto thee, O Lord? Among the gods who is like unto thee? Understanding faints in attempting to ascend to thee. Imagination, to which thou hast given a half-creative faculty, cannot beget a thought of equal height to thy thoughts, nor conceive a way which may bear comparison with thy ways. What better can we do, great God, than bow our heads and reverently adore?

This morning, in trying to discuss our text, we will endeavour to illustrate it by its own connection. There are many ways of handling Scripture, but to my mind the freshest and most instructive is to expound it by its surroundings. To pick out a plum here and there is the children's method, but hardly satisfies students of the word. "Let us not rend it," is exceedingly good advice with regard to Scripture, which is in some sense the garment of God. I will take hold of the central part of the rich piece of silken truth contained in this chapter, and I will lift up the whole fabric before you and bid you observe its texture, and note how wonderfully it is wrought throughout. Exposition is ever nourishing to the Lord's people, and this it is which we shall aim at. I think there are three things which are very clear in the text if viewed in its connection: first, in the text there is *rebuke administered*; secondly, there is *repentance encouraged*; and, thirdly, there is *expectation excited*.

I. First in the text there is *REBUKE ADMINISTERED*, for thus it runs: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." Do you not observe a sort of ringing of the changes upon the words "thoughts" and "ways"? This proves to my mind that the connection mainly lies in this first point. The Lord says, "Forsake your way, for it is not my way; leave your thoughts, for they are not my thoughts. Your way ought to be my way; your thoughts ought to be my thoughts, so far as the weakness of creaturehood will allow. But it is not so: you have wandered away from me; you think not such thoughts as I would have you think, you walk not in such a way as I would have you choose: therefore forsake your ways and your thoughts, and turn unto your God." It is a remonstrance tenderly administered, mixed up with such sweet exhortation that no degree of bitterness is perceptible in it. The rebuke is enveloped in love, and made into a sugar-coated pill: the sweet promise of abundant pardon conceals the reproof.

Now let us take the rebuke and notice, first, *the fault of man's thoughts*: "My thoughts are not your thoughts." *As between each other*, God's thoughts are not man's, though they ought to be. God's thoughts are love, pity, tenderness; ours are forgetfulness, ingratitude, and hard-heartedness. He thinks of us as lost sheep are thought of by the shepherd, as a prodigal child is thought of by his father: but our thoughts are not of like kind. In its wandering state the sheep has no thought of returning to the Shepherd, and the prodigal son, until converting grace meets with him, has no reciprocal affection towards his Father. It is sad that the God of love should have to say, "My thoughts are not your thoughts." God's thoughts to us are thoughts of love, but

not so ours to him. He is tender of our comfort, but we are not tender of his honour ; he considers our interests, but we think not of his glory ; he watches over our safety, but we are not watchful to keep his statutes. He loads us with benefits, but we only load him with our sins ; he has given us all that we have, but we bring him cold thanks in return. You love, O ungodly men, to live without remembering God : he is not in all your thoughts. You have no consideration for your Maker, no deference for your Preserver, no care for your best Friend. He feels your ungenerous conduct, for he says, " If then I be a father, where is mine honour ? and if I be a master, where is my fear ? " Alas, man returns not according to the benefit received, but often renders evil for good. When the Lord deigned to visit earth as the incarnate God, the acts of man proved that his thoughts are not God's thoughts. God's thoughts were all goodness to men, but men found him here in human form, and their thoughts and ways were full of enmity and murder towards him ; therefore they cried, " Crucify him ! Crucify him ! " How terribly has man departed from his God !

Your thoughts as to your *conduct* are not God's thoughts. He considers that the creatures he has made should obey him, but you judge that it matters not what a man does towards his Maker so long as he is just towards his fellow-men. God declares that no conduct can justify a man unless it be absolutely perfect, and wholly conformed to his law ; but man imagines that if he does his best it will suffice, and that even if he does not do his best a little profession of repentance will wipe off old scores, and he may stand self-justified before God. Man thinks that he has done wondrously if he gives now and then a little attention to outward religion, even though his heart may be far from God ; but the Lord looks at the heart, and searches the secret places of the mind, and he values nothing but what is done out of love to him. Man slights the inward and only regards the outward, for God's thoughts are not his thoughts. Oh you that are satisfied with your own conduct, and perfectly content that things are well enough with you, I beseech you to recollect that your self-congratulatory thoughts are not the thoughts of God. He looketh into the soul's secrets, and he is not deceived by the words and professions of those who draw near to him with their lips but in secret continue in their iniquity.

God's thoughts, again, as to the *life* which a man needs in order to salvation are very different from man's thoughts. Did you notice how in this chapter he says, " Hear, and your soul shall live " ? He reckons, then, that man is dead till he has heard the word of God in his soul. Man reckons that he is alive enough ; he is perfectly satisfied with the mental life which he possesses, and does not desire spiritual life, for as yet he cannot apprehend it. Here is a wide difference ! God thinketh of thee, O sinner, as dead and beginning to corrupt. He thinketh of thee as we think of a corpse when we cry, " Bury my dead out of my sight. " But thou thinkest of thyself as of a creature fair to look upon, filled with beauty, abounding with ability, and able to perform all spiritual acts at pleasure. Thy boast is that thou hast freedom of will and force of heart to set all things right whenever it pleases thee, and courage and resolution to rout every wrong which may assail thee. Thou art as strong as Goliath and as brave as David in thine own esteem ; but

God thinks not so. His eternal Spirit knows that thou art dead, and he has come to bring thee life: take heed that thou do not reject it. Do not say in thy heart, "I have life enough, and want nothing from the Most High," for this would be thy sure destruction.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, again, in reference to *the truth*. God's thoughts of truth are evidently not man's, for nothing but divine grace can bring man to believe the doctrines of the gospel, or keep him faithful to them. Each generation seems to bring forth its own set of men who set themselves to oppose God's truth from some fresh point. These scribes and counters of the towers are wonderfully busy just now. We have among us a great company of men who have attained repute through daring to assail established truth—wise men if we take their own judgment of themselves, for they are never more at home than when sounding the praises of their own culture and breadth of mind. These Philistines have intruded into the temple under the pretence of trimming our lamps, but their aim is to put them out. Evangelistic light is too clear for them, and they seek to obscure it, hence they give new readings to texts which are translated by better scholars than they will ever be, and put new interpretations upon the doctrines which their fathers held,—interpretations which their sires would indignantly repudiate. Roughly speaking, these men deny everything which faith holds dear, and yet expect to be considered to be Christians. They tear the vitals from every truth, and yet pretend to believe it. Their advanced thought, like a vampire, sucks the blood out of the veins of truth, and he who would drive away the foul thing is called a bigot and a fool. These reverend infidels are to be tolerated as our ministers, or if we decline to reckon those to be Christian ministers who spend all their energies in undermining Christianity, we are in danger of being ridiculed by the sage party which now clamours in the public ear. Well, it was always so. Man thinks himself so wise and good that he does not like God's thoughts concerning himself, his fall, his guilt, and his danger. He tries to think revelation over again, he places it upside down, and then he calls his maunderings "culture," and thought. To get away from the plain teaching of Scripture he babbles about advancement—an advancement which consists in going away from the light, an advancement which will bring us back to stark naked infidelity unless God in infinite mercy shall arrest it. Man likes not the thoughts of God. If God thinks of man as depraved he will not have it: he feels that it is a shameful thing to speak thus of such a noble being as himself. If God declares that man is so fallen that he must be born again, he will not have it: he will sprinkle a few drops of water on a babe's face—heigh, presto! the thing is done. If God thinketh that the sinner shall be cast into hell, where their worm dieth not, men's fears are quieted by being assured by some great divine that there is no hell, that he cannot find mention of it in the Bible, and that at the worst he will only cease to be. Thus do they think, in opposition to the divine thinking, for evermore is it true, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

In the matter of *salvation* God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, for God thinketh that man has so sinned that he must be condemned except a substitute be found. Man thinks not so. God sets before him pardon

freely presented through the precious blood : man thinks to buy it by his devotions, or to win it by his merits. Hence the language preceding our text : " Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live " ; and so on. Those verses hold in solution the thought of our text ; " My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

See then, dear friends, that this is a call to repentance. Man, if you think rightly, you will submit to think as God thinks. If your thoughts are what they should be, they will not contradict God's thoughts, for he knows more than you, and knows better than you. The Infinite, the Eternal, is he to be judged of man's judgment ? Is he to be analysed in the chemist's laboratory ? Are his thoughts to be ridiculed because they are contrary to the reigning philosophy which is probably no more true than the many other forms of human ignorance which have aforetime come and gone in the centuries of the past ? Will not the present dream of mortal wisdom melt like a mist before the sun of gospel truth ? Is God's great system of salvation and providence to be called to the bar of the scientists, who can do no more than dote after the manner of their predecessors ? Shall divine revelation be judged and condemned, as men try a thief ? Nay, worse than this, these sages so despise the teaching of the Lord, that one would think they were a committee of doctors examining a maniac. Let us abhor the presumption of scepticism, and let us be wise enough to know our folly ; rational enough to feel that God is to be obeyed, and not questioned ; and that his revelation is to be believed, and not criticised. Though we think crookedly, God's thoughts are upright ; though we think grovellingly, God thinks sublimely : though we think upon a finite and erroneous scale, God thinks infinitely and infallibly ; and it is ours continually to correct our thoughts by the infallible word, so that our minds are kept in harmony with the sure utterances of the Holy Ghost.

Now, the text advances to say *that man's ways are not like God's* : " My ways are not your ways." Our ways are the outward actions which spring out of our thoughts. God's ways are ways of holiness and purity. God hath never done anything unjust to his creature or unrighteous to himself. But our ways are not so ; they are full of error, marred with evil, polluted with impurity. By nature we love that which we ought to hate. We often put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Oh, brethren, when you think of the character of God and then think of the best man that ever lived, truly " as high as the heavens are above the earth " are his ways above our ways. God's ways are ways of love and tenderness, he is very pitiful, and full of compassion : but our ways are not so—we are often very harsh to one another, and we do not return a filial love to God. I mean not unless his grace meets with us, and even then we fall far short of walking in the love of God as he walks in love toward us. God's ways are ways of truth : he never lies, he has never been unfaithful to us or untrue to his promise ; but we, on the other hand, have proved false to him many a time. " Thou hast dealt very treacherously," said the prophet of old, and the charge lies against us to this day.

We have been traitors to God, but he has been fidelity itself to us. Our good resolves have dissolved in air; our promises have been broken; our vows have all been forgotten. God is all truth and faithfulness to us, and we are all mistrust and doubt and treachery towards him, and were it not for his divine grace we should have even fallen into apostasy, and been like the son of perdition who betrayed his Lord.

God's ways are ways of forgiveness and peace. He doth not desire the death of the sinner. He is very patient, he suffers long, he bears continually with our provocations. He is desirous that men should acquaint themselves with him, and be at peace. His ways are ways of reconciliation, ways of forgiveness, ways of love and kindness; but see ye not that the ways of the natural man are perverse? By nature we do not desire to be at amity with God; on the contrary, we seize upon anything that can aggravate our transgression and widen the breach between ourselves and our offended Lord. We have no patience, we cannot even bear with a little suffering or trial from him, without complaint and murmur. There are men around us who will turn round and curse him to his face, when his hand is smiting and correcting them for their good; ay, and they will do it wantonly without the shadow of reason. Our ways are not God's ways. This is true of every sinner under heaven, and in some measure true of the best of men,—“My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.”

Well, now, beloved, two cannot walk together in heaven except they be of one mind; so that our ways and God's ways must be made to be alike in character. Now, *it is not possible for us to conceive of God's making his thoughts to be like our thoughts.* Who would wish such a thing? Who would desire that the wise and good should stoop to think our folly, and act our madness? Who could wish that the glorious and the perfect should come down to think and act after the manner of unjust, unrighteous man? His thoughts cannot be reduced to ours—what then? Why, *we must rise to him.* Not, of course, to his majesty and sublimity, but we must rise to his holiness, truth, and love. Hence the command which comes before our text, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord.” If infinite purity cannot be expected to become impure, let us ask that our impurity may be taken away, and that we may be made clean in the Lord's sight, so as to hold fellowship with him.

And now I ask you to *consider the difficulty of this.* “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.” Turn thine eyes hither, O self-sufficiency! Canst thou vault into heaven? Standing here upon this lower earth canst thou with a spring leap above yon stars, ascend into the holiness of God, and become a partaker of the divine nature? Surely, now thou hast a task set before thee which will make thee confess thine inability. Yet such an uprising must be accomplished if we are to dwell with God and have fellowship with him. These miry, filthy ways of earth must become like the pure and perfect path of the thrice Holy One or we cannot walk with him. How, then, are we to be lifted up from earth to heaven? The word that answers the question is that matchless syllable, “grace.” God in Christ Jesus, by his almighty grace, must raise us up together with Christ. He who brought

again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ must stoop down to lift us up from the grave of sin, and quicken us into life eternal, or we shall never think his thoughts or follow his ways. Into the light wherein he dwelleth we can never come except by the operations of his divine Spirit. Jesus says, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," and "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." The Holy Ghost must quicken us out of our trespasses and sins, deliver us from the ways in which we walk according to the course of this world, and redeem us from the dominion of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God. By sanctification he must deliver us from our indwelling corruption, and continue the process till he conforms us perfectly to the image of the peerless Son of God. Likeness to Jesus he will work in all believers, and it shall be said of us, "They are without fault before the throne of God," and Christ himself shall say, "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." It is clear, then, that our text is a gentle but earnest rebuke, veiled in abounding love.

II. Now, secondly, we shall view the text under another aspect. Here we have REPENTANCE ENCOURAGED. Kindly look at the seventh verse: "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts." It is clear that there is a connecting link between the abundance of pardon and the lofty character of God, and that men are encouraged to forsake their ways and thoughts by the hope of pardon derived from the greatness of the divine thoughts and ways.

First, O sinner, turn from your way at once, and seek the Lord, and *do not stand back because you cannot understand God*. It is not needful that you should comprehend his ways and thoughts; you are not asked to do so; in fact, you are told in the text that you cannot do anything of the kind. You are bidden to forsake your way and receive mercy by hearing his word and believing it, for as the heavens are high above the earth, so high are his ways above your ways. You cannot understand it: you waste time while raising this question and that, prying into God's eternal purposes, gazing into the dazzling light of sovereignty, questioning electing love, diving into mysteries of the trinity, and the like: you are to "hear, and your soul shall live." Return you unto our God, and he will abundantly pardon you. Though you cannot grapple with his sublimity, submit to his mercy. You may conclude that it is not intended that you should understand the infinite, for you are told that his thoughts and ways are far above you; but you are required to seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Come and close with his free invitation to give you wine and milk without money and without price. Forsaking your sin, come and be at peace with him at once.

Neither start back because you cannot find a parallel to the grace which God declares that he will display towards you. What if you have looked over all the history of man and you can find nothing among men that can at all equal the abundance of divine pardon, do not therefore hesitate to believe, for God's thoughts are above all human thoughts. Man finds it hard to forgive at all. One of the sternest lessons which some men have to learn is to forgive their brethren unto seventy times seven. Man can with difficulty forgive repeated offences; he usually draws an

argument for anger from the repetition of the provocation. Nor can he forgive a large number of offenders : he might pardon one, but to forgive many is more than most men will even attempt to do : they are filled with indignation, and resist those who annoy them. When offences are aggravated wilfully, when they provoke by being committed against love and against kindness, men will not forgive. Even the most forgiving become at last incensed, but God passes by myriads of transgressions. Do not wait until you find a man who could forgive you, God can do what man never dreams of doing. His thoughts are above your thoughts and his ways above your ways. Peradventure conscience has been busy as to your own shortcomings, and you feel yourself to be self-condemned. In the honesty of your judgment you have felt compelled to cry, "I could not do otherwise than pass sentence of condemnation upon myself if I were made my own judge." 'Tis a right verdict, but do not forget that Jesus died, and now far above all thoughts of ours mercy's wing can mount ; yea, the everlasting mountains of Jehovah's forgiving love are above the heavens : grace overtops all things. Think of this, O repenting sinner, and be encouraged.

Man's forgiveness is seldom free, like that of God, who delights to pardon sin. No sooner do we transgress than God is ready to forgive. Man's forgiveness is never so full as God's, for the Lord forgives and harbours no resentment, he preserves no recollection of our transgressions : he casts them into the depths of the sea, and remembers them no more. Man's forgiveness is seldom so real as God's, for though man says he has forgiven, he does not afterwards delight in the offender as he may have done before : there is a chill in his heart towards the person who injured him, and by his cautious dealing he shows that he remembers the wrong ; but the Lord God so effectually and wholly forgets transgression that he presses the offender to his heart, adopts him into his family, and lifts him up to dwell for ever with him above.

Now, beloved, according to our text, *whatever your ways towards God shall be in the future, he will exceed them.* Are your ways right towards your Father now ? Do you begin with trembling footsteps to seek his house ? Lo, he runs to meet you. The prodigal's Father meets him far more than half way, for his ways are above our ways. Do you stand before him weeping ? It is well : these ways of repentance are good, but better are the ways of God, for Jesus stands before you, bleeding for your sake. Blood he gives, instead of tears. Do you love the Redeemer because of his dying for you ? Alas, you do not love so greatly as he loves you : his love is a sea, and yours a tiny brooklet. Will you henceforth give him all your life ? Yet not such a life as he gives to you—a life perfect and eternal, and all for you ! He lives for you, and saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Come back, O penitent, for when you do come back, if divine grace has put some goodness into your ways, yet there shall be still infinitely more goodness in the ways of God.

And as to your thoughts—can you think of how he will receive you ? Oh, you do not dream how gladly he will meet you, and how kindly he will receive you. You are about to cry, "I am not worthy to be called thy son" ; but he will say to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." You

hope that there will be gladness when you are restored, but you have no idea of the music and the dancing which will flood even heaven itself with rejoicing. You faintly hope that God will love you, but you have no idea how much; nor what great things his love will do for you. The half has never been told you by the most faithful witness for God. Those who have experienced most of the divine love have never been able to communicate to you any idea of what that love is. God's thoughts are above your thoughts as much as the heavens are above the earth. Come, then, to him. Infinite grace awaits you, a tender reception, a perfect cleansing, a divine adorning, eternal security, endless bliss shall all be yours! Why do you linger? The life of God shall be in you, and the joy of Christ shall fill you to the full. If this does not encourage men to repent, what can?

III. And now let us touch upon the third point, which is this, EXPECTATION EXCITED. I said I was going to keep to the connection of the text, and so I will; but this time the link is forward instead of backward. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For"—you see there is the link word "for" to join our text to that which follows, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater. So shall my word be." Now, if you hearken to the Lord and take his thoughts to be your thoughts, and earnestly pray him to make his ways to be your ways, from this time forth and for ever, you may justly indulge the highest expectations, and they shall be exceeded. This chapter tells you what to expect. First, you are to expect that *the Lord's word will be unfailing to you*. What is this "word"? You see we have had "thought" and "way," and now we come to "word." God's word is his thoughts spoken, and God's word is also his ways, for "He speaks and it is done, he commands and it stands fast." His "word" is "thought," and "way" put together. Now that "word" of his shall never be broken to you. Poor sinner, forsake your ways, forsake your thoughts, and come and trust in God, and his word shall be like himself, immutable, eternal, infallible, and full of boundless blessing to you. It shall be powerful to bless you, mighty to fertilize you; it shall be like rain and snow, which go not back to heaven, but sink into the earth to make it bring forth and bud. From that day forward, when you are reconciled to God, you may take any promise you find in the word and say, "Lord, fulfil this word unto thy servant whereon thou hast caused me to hope," and it shall be so. Come and trust him, and promises which now appear above you, and far too rich for such a poor worm as you are, shall all be fulfilled to you; they shall come down upon your soul like gentle showers, and make you full of gladness. Such is the fulness of its power that you shall be able to respond to God's word by a holy and gracious life, and your soul, barren as it now is, shall be made to bring forth and bud. That is one blessed thing which you may confidently expect, for you are coming to a God of great ways and thoughts.

The next is that you are returning to a God whose ways are so much above your ways, and his thoughts so much above your thoughts, that *your heart shall be filled with joy*—"ye shall go out with joy, and

be led forth with peace." God will not merely break off your chains and say in cold accents, "You are free;" but he will release you amid the music of the spheres; and angels shall lead you forth in peace, and your tongue shall sing, "I am forgiven! I am forgiven! I am accepted! I am redeemed! Behold, now do I go forth out of my captivity with joy, and God's angels lead me forth with peace." Who would not be a penitent if such things may be expected from the sublime grandeur of the goodness of God?

Next to this, *all your surroundings shall minister to your gladness.* "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." In your journey through life mountains have hitherto been hard to climb, and forests tangled and dark have been your dread; but now so greatly good is God to those whose ways become his ways, that the mountain which you feared shall break forth into song, and the forest at which you trembled shall become an orchestra in which every tree shall clap its hands for joy. You do not know what awaits coming sinners. You that are willing to hear that your soul may live,—you that are willing to accept the covenant which God made with great David's greater son—you shall see the whole world robed in the garments of praise, and your heart shall be so filled with gladness that it shall overflow and flood all nature with joy.

And then there shall happen to you *wonderful transformations.* Because God's ways are above your ways, he will do what you never thought could be done; the thorns shall be transmuted into fir trees, and the briars into myrtles. There shall be a change in you, such a wonderful change, that all things shall become new. There shall be a change in all that concerns you; the Bible shall become a treasure and the Sabbath a delight, the mercy-seat a loved resort and the path of obedience a way of pleasantness. Sin shall be uprooted and virtue shall be implanted. Evil habits shall be withered and holy principles shall be nourished. You do not know, and you cannot guess, what honour, pleasure, dignity, and glory it is to be in Christ. You who have never come to God cannot conceive the bliss of life with God by Jesus Christ. As a deaf man can have no notion of music, as a man born blind can have no conception of the splendour of the rainbow, so ye deaf and blind, you do not know what the Christian life is for excellence and happiness, but you may guess that it is surpassingly delightful when you hear that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are the Lord's ways above our ways.

Last of all, *this mercy is to endure for ever.* Man's thoughts are for a time, and his ways but for a season; God is eternal: when he thinks his thoughts abide for ever, and when he acts his ways are everlasting. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance—he never changes his mind. Perhaps you think that salvation is a thing to be found and lost, to be gained and forfeited, to be enjoyed to-day and deplored to-morrow, and truly there are some who tell us so; but so speaks not the word of the Lord, for it is written, "It shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Once come and walk in the ways of God, and his grace will keep you in them, and you shall find a growing delight in them. Once come

and learn the thoughts of God, and surrender intellect and heart entirely to his supremacy, and if it be a sincere surrender his Holy Spirit will henceforth guide your thinkings and direct your believings, so that you shall continue steadfast in his fear, and your path shall be that of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Oh, who would not yield to such a God as our God, whose goodness excels our largest desires? If I were engaged upon the wretched errand of charging you to submit to a remorseless tyrant who would never forgive, my message would be hard to deliver; but because Jesus the Son of God has died, and by his death has expiated sin, we are authorised and empowered to cry in the name of God, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

If all this should seem to be too good to be true, as often it has done,—if the sinner should feel unable to believe that he can obtain immediate forgiveness for a long life of transgression, we are then commanded to tell you that you must not measure God by yourself, nor calculate what he can do by what your fellow man can perform. The Lord can forgive what else could never be forgiven. He can pour out mercies so multiplied as to baffle human arithmetic. He can bless you beyond your desire. He can delight you beyond a dream, and he can finally give you a heaven which "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man." Close in with him, soul, at once, while yet in the person of the Lord Jesus he commands your faith. Go not about by good works and prayers and tears to obtain forgiveness; spend not your money on that which is not bread, but come, penniless and poor as you are, and buy the wine and milk of covenant blessing, without money and without price. Lend the willing ear and yield the believing heart. "Hear, and your soul shall live"; believe, and you shall be saved. Through Jesus Christ we proclaim the good news, and for his sake we implore a blessing upon it. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah lv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—36 (Vers. I.), 103, 202.

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JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 9TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Jesus Christ himself.”—Ephesians ii. 20.

“JESUS CHRIST himself” is to occupy all our thoughts this morning. What an ocean opens up before me! Here is sea-room for the largest barque! In which direction shall I turn your thoughts? I am embarrassed with riches. I know not where to begin: and when I once begin where shall I end? Assuredly we need not go abroad for joys this morning, for we have a feast at home. The words are few, but the meaning vast—“Jesus Christ himself.”

Beloved, the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ contains in it nothing so wonderful as himself. It is a mass of *marvels*, but he is THE miracle of it; the wonder of wonders is “The Wonderful” himself. If *proof* be asked of the truth which he proclaimed, we point men to Jesus Christ himself. His character is unique. We defy unbelievers to imagine another like him. He is God and yet man, and we challenge them to compose a narrative in which the two apparently incongruous characters shall be so harmoniously blended,—in which the human and divine shall be so marvellously apparent, without the one overshadowing the other. They question the authenticity of the four Gospels; will they try and write a fifth? Will they even attempt to add a few incidents to the life which shall be worthy of the sacred biography, and congruous with those facts which are already described? If it be all a forgery, will they be so good as to show us how it is done? Will they find a novelist who will write another biography of a man of any century they choose, of any nationality, or of any degree of experience, or any rank or station, and let us see if they can describe in that imaginary life a devotion, a self-sacrifice, a truthfulness, a completeness of character at all comparable to that of Jesus Christ himself? Can they invent another perfect character even if the divine element be left out? They must of necessity fail, for there is none like unto Jesus himself.

The character of Jesus has commanded respect even from those who

have abhorred his teaching. It has been a stumbling-stone to all objectors who have preserved a shade of candour. Jesus' doctrine they could refute, they say ; his precepts they could improve, so they boast ; his system is narrow and outworn, so they assert : but himself—what can they do with him ? They must admire him even if they will not adore him ; and having done so they have admired a personage who must be divine, or else he wilfully left his disciples to believe a lie. How will they surmount this difficulty ? They cannot do so by railing at him, for they have no material for accusation. Jesus Christ himself silences their cavillings. This is a file at which these asps do bite, but break their teeth. Beyond all argument or miracle, Jesus Christ himself is the proof of his own gospel.

And as he is the proof of it, so, beloved, he is the *marrow* and essence of it. When the apostle Paul meant that the gospel was preached he said, "Christ is preached," for the gospel is Christ himself. If you want to know what Jesus taught, know himself. He is the incarnation of that truth which by him and in him is revealed to the sons of men. Did he not himself say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" ? You have not to take down innumerable tomes, nor to pore over mysterious sentences of double meaning in order to know what our great teacher has revealed, you have but to turn and gaze upon his countenance, behold his actions, and note his spirit, and you know his teaching. He lived what he taught. If we wish to know him, we may hear his gentle voice saying "Come and see." Study his wounds, and you understand his innermost philosophy. "To know him and the power of his resurrection" is the highest degree of spiritual learning. He is the end of the law and the soul of the gospel, and when we have preached his word to the full, we may close by saying, "Now, of the things which we have spoken this is the sum,—we have an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens."

Nor is he alone the proof of his gospel and the substance of it, but he is the *power* and force by which it spreads. When a heart is truly broken for sin, it is by him that it is bound up. If a man is converted, it is by Christ, the power of God. If we enter into peace and salvation it is by the gracious manifestation of Jesus himself. If men have enthusiastically loved Christianity, it is because first of all they loved Christ : for him apostles laboured, and for him confessors were brave ; for him saints have suffered the loss of all things, and for him martyrs have died. The power which creates heroic consecration is "Jesus Christ himself." The memories stirred by his name have more influence over men's hearts than all things else in earth or heaven. The enthusiasm which is the very life of our holy cause comes from himself. They who know not Jesus know not the life of truth, but those who dwell in him are filled with power, and overflow so that out of the midst of them streams forth living water. Nor is it only so, beloved ; for the power which propagates the gospel is Jesus himself. In heaven he pleads, and therefore does his kingdom come. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." It is from heaven that he rules all things so as to promote the advance of the truth. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, and therefore are we to proclaim his life-giving word with full assurance of success. He causes the wheel of providence to

revolve in such a manner as to help his cause; he abridges the power of tyrants, overrules the scourge of war, establishes liberty in nations, opens the mysteries of continents long unknown, breaks down systems of error, and guides the current of human thought. He works by a thousand means, preparing the way of the Lord. It is from heaven that he shall shortly come, and when he cometh, when Christ himself shall put forth all his might, then shall the wilderness rejoice and the solitary place be glad. The reserve force of the gospel is Christ Jesus himself. The latent power which shall at last break every bond, and win universal dominion, is the energy, the life, the omnipotence of Jesus himself. He sleeps in the vessel now, but when he arises and chides the storm there will be a deep calm. He now for awhile concealeth himself in the ivory palaces of glory, but when he is manifested in *that day* his chariot wheels shall bring victory to his church militant.

If these things be so, I have a theme before me which I cannot compass. I forbear the impossible task, and I shall but briefly note some few apparent matters which lie upon the surface of the subject.

Brethren, "Jesus Christ himself" should always be the prominent thought of our minds as Christians. Our theology should be framed upon the fact that he is the Centre and Head of all. We must remember that "in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Some of our brethren are mainly taken up with the doctrines of the gospel, and are somewhat bitter in their narrow orthodoxy. We are to love every word of our Lord Jesus and his apostles, and are to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints, but yet it is well always to hold truth in connection with Jesus and not as in itself alone the sum of all things. Truth isolated from the person of Jesus grows hard and cold. We know some in whom the slightest variation from their system arouses their indignation, even though they admit that the brother is full of the Spirit of Christ. It is with them doctrine, doctrine, doctrine: with us, I trust, it is Christ himself. True doctrine is to us priceless as a throne for our living Lord, but our chief delight is not in the vacant throne, but in the King's presence thereon. Give me not his garments, though I prize every thread, but the blessed wearer whose sacred energy made even the hem thereof to heal with a touch.

There are others of our brethren who delight above measure in what they call experimental preaching, which sets forth the inner life of the believer, both the rage of depravity and the triumph of grace: this is well in due proportion, according to the analogy of faith: but still Jesus himself should be more conspicuous than our frames and feelings, doubts and fears, struggles and victories. We may get to study the action of our own hearts so much that we fall into despondency and despair. "Looking unto Jesus" is better than looking unto our own progress: self-examination has its necessary uses, but to have done with self and live by faith in Jesus Christ himself is the best course for a Christian.

Then, there are others who rightly admire the precepts of the gospel, and are never so happy as when they are hearing them enforced, as, indeed, they ought to be; but after all the commands of our Lord are not our Lord himself, and they derive their value to us and their power over our obedience from the fact that they are *his* words, and that

he said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." We know the truth of his declaration, "If a man love me he will keep my sayings," but there must be the personal love to begin with. Brethren, all the benefits of these three schools will be ours if we live upon Jesus himself. They gather each a flower, but our divine "plant of renown" has all the beauty, and all the fragrance, of all that they can gather; and without the thorns which are so apt to grow on their peculiar roses. Jesus Christ himself is to us precept, for he is the way: he is to us doctrine, for he is the truth: he is to us experience, for he is the life. Let us make him the pole star of our religious life in all things. Let him be first, last, and midst; yea, let us say, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." And yet do not, I beseech you, disdain the doctrine, lest in marring the doctrine you should be guilty of insult to Jesus himself. To trifle with truth is to despise Jesus as our Prophet. Do not for a moment underrate experience, lest in neglecting the inner self you also despise your Lord himself as your cleansing Priest; and never for a moment forget his commandments lest if ye break them ye transgress against Jesus himself as your King. All things which touch upon his kingdom are to be treated reverently by us for the sake of himself: his book, his day, his church, his ordinances, must all be precious to us, because they have to do with him; but in the front of all must ever stand "Jesus Christ himself," the personal, living, loving Jesus; Christ in us the hope of glory, Christ for us our full redemption, Christ with us our guide and our solace, and Christ above us pleading and preparing our place in heaven. Jesus Christ himself is our captain, our armour, our strength, and our victory. We inscribe his name upon our banner, for it is hell's terror, heaven's delight, and earth's hope. We bear this upon our hearts in the heat of the conflict, for this is our breastplate and coat of mail.

I shall not endeavour to say anything this morning which will strike you as beautiful in language, for to endeavour to decorate the altogether Lovely One would be blasphemy. To hang flowers upon the cross is ridiculous, and to endeavour to adorn him whose head is as the most fine gold, and whose person is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires, would be profane. I shall but tell you simple things in simple language: yet are these the most precious and soul-satisfying of the truths of revelation.

I. With Jesus Christ himself we begin by saying, first, that Jesus himself is THE ESSENCE OF HIS OWN WORK, and therefore *how readily we ought to trust him*. Jesus himself is the soul of his own salvation. How does the apostle describe it? "He loved me, and gave *himself* for me." He gave his crown, his throne, and his joys in heaven for us, but that was not all—he gave himself. He gave his life on earth, and renounced all the comforts of existence, and bore all its woes; he gave his body, he gave his agony, he gave his heart's blood: but the summary of it is, he gave himself for me. "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." No proxy service here! No sacrifice which runs as far as his own person and there stops! There was no limit to the grief of Jesus like that set upon the suffering of Job,—“Only on himself lay not thine hand,” or “Only spare his life.” No, every reserve was taken down, for he gave himself. “He saved others; himself he could not save,” because he

himself was the very essence of his own sacrifice on our behalf. It is because he is what he is that he was able to redeem us: the dignity of his person imparted efficacy to his atonement. He is divine, God over all, blessed for ever, and therefore infinite virtue is found in him; he is human, and perfect in that humanity, and therefore capable of obedience and suffering in man's place and stead. He is able to save us because he is Immanuel—"God with us." If it were conceivable that an angel could have suffered the same agonies, and have performed the same labours, as our Lord, yet it is not conceivable that the same result would have followed. The pre-eminence of his person imparted weight to his work. Always think then when you view the atonement, that it is Jesus himself who is the soul of it. Indeed the efficacy of his sacrifice lies there; hence the apostle in the Hebrews speaks of him as having "by himself purged our sins." This purging was wrought by his sacrifice, but the sacrifice was himself. Paul says, "he offered up himself." He stood as a priest at the altar offering a bloody sacrifice, but the offering was neither bullock, nor ram, nor turtle dove; it was himself. "Once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The sole reason why we are well-pleasing with God is because of him, for he is our sweet savour-offering; and the only cause for the putting away of our sin is found in him because he is our sin-offering. The cleansing by the blood, and the washing by the water, are the result, not of the blood and the water in and of themselves and separate from him, but because they were the essentials of himself. You see this, I am persuaded, without my enlarging upon it.

Now, because of this, *the Lord Jesus Christ himself is the object of our faith.* Is he not always so described in Scripture? "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth,"—not "look to my cross," nor "look to my life," nor "to my death," much less "to my sacraments or to my servants," but "look unto me." From his own lips the words sound forth, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In fact, it is the Christian's life motto, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." May I not go further and say, *how very simple and how very easy and natural ought faith to be henceforth?* I might be puzzled with various theories of the atonement, but I can believe in Jesus himself: I might be staggered by the divers mysteries which concern theology, and overpower even master-minds, but I can confide in Jesus himself. He is one whom it is difficult to distrust: his goodness, gentleness, and truth command our confidence. We can and do trust in Jesus himself. If he be proposed to me as my Saviour, and if faith in him be that which saves me, then at his dear feet I cast myself unreservedly, and feel myself secure while he looks down on me. He who bled that sinners might be saved cannot be doubted any more: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Now you who have been looking to your faith, I want you to look to Jesus himself rather than at your poor feeble faith. Now you who have been studying the results of faith in yourselves and are dissatisfied, I beseech you turn your eyes away from yourselves and look to Jesus himself. Now you who cannot understand this and cannot understand that, give up wanting to understand for the while, and come and look at Jesus Christ himself, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of

glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." The Lord grant us grace to view Jesus Christ himself in the matter of our salvation as all in all, so that we may have personal dealings with him, and no more think of him as a mere idea, or as an historical personage, but as a personal Saviour standing in the midst of us, and bidding us enter into peace through him.

II. "Jesus Christ himself" is as we have said **THE SUBSTANCE OF THE GOSPEL, and therefore how closely should we study him.** While he was here he taught his disciples, and *the object of his teaching was that they might know himself*, and through him might know the Father. They did not learn very fast, but you see what he meant them to learn by the observation he made to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known *me*, Philip?" He meant them to know himself; and when he had risen from the dead the same object was still before him. As he walked with the two disciples to Emmaus they had wide choice of subjects for conversation, but he chose the old theme, and "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." No topic was one half so important or profitable. No mere man may come to teach himself, but this divine One can have nothing better to reveal, for he himself, the incarnate God, is the chief of all truth. Hence our Lord was concerned to be known to his people, and therefore again and again we read that "Jesus showed himself unto his disciples." Whatever else they may be ignorant of, it is essential to disciples that they know their Lord. His nature, his character, his mind, his spirit, his object, his power, we must know—in a word, we must know Jesus himself.

This also, beloved, is the work of the Holy Spirit. "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." The Holy Ghost reveals Christ to us and in us. Whatsoever things Christ hath spoken while he was here, the Holy Ghost opens to the mind and to the understanding, and thus by speaking of Christ within us he carries on the work which our Lord began when here below. The Comforter is the instructor and Jesus is the lesson. I dare say you long to know a thousand things, but the main point of knowledge to be desired is Jesus himself. This was his teaching, and this is the Holy Spirit's teaching, and *this is the end and object of the Bible.* Moses, Esaias, and all the prophets spake of him, and the things which are recorded in this book were written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing ye might have life through his name. Precious is this book, but its main preciousness lies in its revealing Jesus himself, it is the field which contains the pearl of great price, the casket which encloses heaven's brightest jewel. We have missed our way in the Bible if its silken clue has not led us to the central chamber where we see Jesus himself. We have never been truly taught of the Holy Ghost, and we have missed the teaching of the life of Christ, unless we have come to abide in Jesus himself. To know him is our beginning of wisdom and our crown of wisdom. To know him is our first lesson on the stool of penitence and our last attainment as we enter heaven. Our ambition is that we may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Here is our life study, and we have good associates in it, for these things the angels desire to look into. May the Lord grant that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened, that we

may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

Beloved, because Jesus is the sum of the gospel *he must be our constant theme*. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." So spake men of old, and so say we. When we have done preaching Christ we had better have done preaching; when you have done teaching in your classes Jesus Christ himself, give up Sunday school work, for nothing else is worthy of your pains. Put out the sun, and light is gone, life is gone, all is gone. When Jesus is pushed into the background or left out of a minister's teaching, the darkness is darkness that might be felt, and the people escape from it into gospel light as soon as they can. A sermon without Jesus in it is savourless, and worthless to God's tried saints, and they soon seek other food. The more of Christ in our testimony the more of light and life and power to save. Some preachers are guilty of the most wearisome tautology, but this is not laid to their charge when their theme is Jesus. I have heard hearers declare that their minister appeared to have bought a barrel organ on which he could grind five or six tunes and no more, and these he ground out for ever and ever, amen. They have been weary, very weary, of such vain repetitions; but to this day I never heard of anybody against whom the complaint was urged that he preached Christ too much, too often, too earnestly, or too joyfully. I never recollect seeing a single Christian man coming out of a congregation with a sorrowful face saying, "He extolled the Redeemer too highly: he grossly exaggerated the praises of our Saviour." I do not remember ever meeting with a case in which the sick upon the bed of languishing have complained that thoughts of Jesus were burdensome to them. I never recollect that a single book has been denounced by earnest Christian men because it spoke too highly of the Lord, and made him too prominent. No, my brethren, he who is the study of the saints must be the daily theme of ministers if they would feed the flock of God. No theme so moves the heart, so arouses the conscience, so satisfies the desires, and so calms the fears. God forbid we should ever fail to preach Jesus himself. There is no fear of exhausting the subject, nor of our driving away our hearers, for his words are still true, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

III. Jesus Christ himself is THE OBJECT OF OUR LOVE, and *how dear he should be*. We can all of us who are really saved declare that "We love him because he first loved us." We have an intense affection for his blessed person as well gratitude for his salvation. The personality of Christ is a fact always to be kept prominently in our thoughts. The love of a truth is all very well, but the love of a person has far more power in it. We have heard of men dying for an idea, but it is infinitely more easy to awaken enthusiasm for a person. When an idea becomes embodied in a man it has a force which in its abstract form it never wielded. Jesus Christ is loved by us as the embodiment of everything that is lovely, and true, and pure, and of good report. He himself is incarnate perfection, inspired by love. We love his offices, we love the types which describe him, we love the ordinances by which he is set forth, but we love

himself best of all. He himself is our beloved; our heart rests only in him.

Because we love him we love his people, and through him we enter into union with them. Our text is taken from a verse which says, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." He is the binder at the corner, joining Jew and Gentile in one temple. In Jesus those ancient differences cease, for he "hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace." We are at one with every man who is at one with Christ. Only let our Lord say, "I love that man," and we love him at once; let us only hope that our friend can say, "I love Jesus," and we hasten to respond, "And I love you for Jesus' sake." So warm is the fire of our love to Jesus that all his friends may sit at it, and welcome. Our circle of affection comprehends all who in any shape or way have truly to do with Jesus himself.

Because we love himself we delight to render service to him. Whatever service we do for his church, and for his truth, we do for his sake, even if we can only render it to the least of his brethren we do it unto him. The woman with the alabaster box of precious ointment is a type which we greatly prize, for she would only break the precious box *for him*, and every drop of its delicious contents must be poured only upon his head. The bystanders complained of waste, but there can be no waste in anything that is done for Jesus. If the whole world, and the heavens, and the heaven of heavens were all one great alabaster box, and if all the sweets which can be conceived were hived within it, we would wish to see the whole broken, that every drop of the sweetness might be poured out for Jesus Christ himself.

"Jesus is worthy to receive
Honour and power divine;
And blessings more than we can give,
Be Lord, for ever thine."

Oh our Beloved, if we can do anything for thee, we are charmed at possessing such a privilege. If we are allowed to wash thy disciples' feet, or to care for the poorest of thy poor, or the least lamb of thy flock, we accept the office as a high honour, for we love thee with all our hearts. Our love to Jesus should be as much a matter of fact as our affection for our husband, wife, or child, and it should be far more influential upon our lives. Love to our Lord is, I trust, moving all of you to personal service. You might have paid a subscription and allowed others to work, but you cannot do it when you see that Jesus gave himself for you. Jesus himself demands that I myself should be consecrated to his praise. Personal service is due to a personal Christ, who personally loved and personally died for us. When nothing moves us to zeal, when the jaded spirit cannot follow up its industries, let but Jesus himself appear, and straightway our passions are all in a blaze, and the fiery spirit compels the flesh to warm to its work again. We even glory in infirmity when Jesus is near, and venture upon works which else had seemed impossible. We can do anything and everything for "Jesus Christ himself."

IV. Fourthly, our Lord Jesus Christ himself is **THE SOURCE OF ALL**

OUR JOY. *How ought we to rejoice when we have such a springing well of blessedness.* In times of sorrow our solace is Jesus himself. It is no small ground of comfort to a mourner that Jesus himself is a man. How cheering to read, "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same." The humanity of Christ has a charm about it which the quietly sorrowful alone discover. I have known what it is to gaze upon the incarnation with calm repose of heart when my brain has seemed to be on fire with anguish. If Jesus be indeed my brother man, there is hope at all times. This is better balm than that of Gilead, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses"; "For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able also to succour them that are tempted." Pain, hunger, thirst, desertion, scorn, and agony Jesus himself has borne. Tempted in all points like as we are, though without sin, he has become the chief Comforter of the sorrowful. Many and many a sufferer in the lone watches of the night has thought of him and felt his strength renewed. Our patience revives when we see the Man of Sorrows silent before his accusers. Who can refuse to drink of his cup and to be baptized with his baptism?

"His way was much rougher and darker than mine :
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?"

The darkness of Gethsemane has been light to many an agonized soul, and the passion even unto death has made the dying sing for joy of heart. Jesus himself is the solace of our soul in sorrow, and when we emerge from the storm of distress into the deep calm of peace, as we often do, blessed be his name, he is our peace. Peace he left us by legacy, and peace he creates in person. We never know deep peace of heart until we know the Lord Jesus himself. You remember that sweet word when the disciples were met together, the doors being shut for fear of the Jews, "Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and said, Peace be unto you." Jesus himself you see brought the message; for nothing but his presence could make it effectual. When we see him our spirit smells a sweet savour of rest. Where can an aching head find such another pillow as his bosom?

On high days and holidays our spirits soar beyond rest: we ascend into the heaven of joy and exultation; but then it is our Lord's joy which is in us making our joy full. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord," and then are we glad also. By faith we see Jesus himself enthroned, and this has filled us with delight, for his glorification is our satisfaction. "Him also hath God highly exalted, and given him a name which is above every name." I care not what becomes of me so long as he is glorified. The soldier dies happy when the shout of victory salutes his ear, and his failing sight beholds his prince triumphant. What a joy to think that Jesus is risen—risen to die no more: the joy of resurrection is superlative. What bliss to know that he has ascended, leading captivity captive, that he sitteth now enthroned in happy state, and that he will come in all the glory of the Father to break his enemies in pieces as with a rod of iron. Here lies the grandest joy of his expectant church. She has in reserve a mighty thunder of hosannahs for that auspicious day.

If there is any joy to be had, O Christian, that is both *safe and sweet*, a joy of which none can know too much, it is to be found in him whom as yet you see not, but in whom believing you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

We must tear ourselves away from that thought to turn to another, but assuredly it is rich in happy memories and in blessed expectations.

V. Fifthly, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF IS THE MODEL OF OUR LIFE, and therefore *how blessed it is to be like him*. As to our rule for life, we are like the disciples on the mount of transfiguration when Moses and Elias had vanished, for we see "no man save Jesus only." Every virtue found in other men we find in him in greater perfection; we admire the grace of God in them, but Jesus himself is our pattern. It was once said of Henry VIII., by a severe critic, that if the characteristics of all the tyrants that had ever lived had been forgotten, they might all have been seen to the life in that one king: we may more truly say of Jesus, if all graces, and virtues, and sweetnesses which have ever been seen in good men could all be forgotten, you might find them all in him: for in him dwells all that is good and great. We, therefore, desire to copy his character and put our feet into his footprints. Be it ours to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. What saith our Lord himself? "Follow me," and again, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Not Christ's apostle, but Christ himself, is our guide; we may not take a secondary model, but must imitate Jesus himself. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and his gracious operations we are developing into the image of Christ till Christ be formed in us; and we thus develop because the heavenly life in us is his own life. "I in them," said he, and again, "I am the life." For "we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God." "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." It is not passing through baptism, nor bearing the name of Christ, it is having Jesus himself in our hearts that makes us Christians, and in proportion as he is formed in us and the new life grows we become more and more like him. And this is our prospect for eternity, that we are to be with him and like him, for "when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Think of him, you that mourn your imperfectness to-day—think of Jesus Christ himself, and then be assured that you are to be like him. What a picture! Come, artist, bring your best skill here. What can you do? All pencils fail to depict *him*. It needs a poet's eye as well as an artist's hand to picture the Lovely One. But what can the poet do? Ah, you also fail; you cannot sing him any more than your friend can paint him. Fruitful conception and soaring imagination may come to your aid, but they cannot prevent your failure. He is too beautiful to be described—he must be seen. Yet here comes the marvel—"We shall be like him"—like Jesus Christ himself. O saint, when thou art risen from the dead how lovely thou wilt be! Wilt thou know thyself? To-day thou art wrinkled with old age, scarred with the marks of disease and pain, and perhaps deformed by accident, or blanched with consumption, but none of these shall blemish thee then. Thou wilt be without spot or wrinkle, faultless before the throne.

"O glorious hour! O blest abode!

I shall be near and like my God."

And not in bodily form alone shall we be like unto him whose eyes are as the eyes of doves, and whose cheeks are as beds of spices ; but in spirit and in soul shall we be perfectly conformed to the Well-beloved. We shall be holy even as he is holy, and happy as he is happy. We shall enter into the joy of our Lord—the joy of Jesus himself. I say not that we can be divine—that cannot be ; but still, brothers to him that is the Son of God, we shall be very near the throne. O what rapture to know that my next of kin liveth, and when he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth I shall not only see God in this my flesh, but I shall be like him, for I shall see him as he is. Christ himself then becomes to us unspeakably precious, as the model of our present life and the image of the perfection towards which the Holy Ghost is working us.

VI. Lastly, HE IS THE LORD OF OUR SOUL. *How sweet it will be to be with him.* We find to-day that his beloved company makes everything move pleasantly whether we run in the way of his commands, or traverse the valley of the shadow of death. Saints have lain in dungeons, and yet they have walked at liberty when he has been there ; they have been stretched on the rack, and even called it a bed of roses when he has stood by. One lay on a gridiron, with the hot fires beneath him ; but amidst the flames he challenged his tormentors to do their worst, and laughed them to scorn, for his Lord was there. Martyrs have been seen to clap their hands when every finger burned like a lighted candle, and they have been heard to cry, “ Christ is all,” “ Christ is all.” When the Fourth, like unto the Son of God, walks in the furnace, all the fire can do is but to snap their bonds and set the sufferers free. Oh, brethren, I am sure your only happiness that has been worth the having has been found in knowing that he loved you and was near you. If you have ever rejoiced in the abundance of your corn and wine and oil, it has been a sorry joy ; it has soon palled upon your taste, it never touched the great depths of your spirit ; and anon it has gone and left you sore wearied in heart. If you have rejoiced in your children, and your kinsfolk, and your bodily health, how readily has God sent a blight upon them all. But when you have rejoiced in Jesus you have heard a voice bidding you proceed to further delights. That voice has cried, “ Drink, O friends, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved ;” for to be inebriated with such joy as this is to come to the best condition of mind, and to fix the soul where it should be. We are never right till we come out of ourselves and into Jesus ; but when the ecstatic state comes, and we stand right out of self, and stand in him, so that whether in the body or out of the body we can scarcely tell, God knoweth ; then are we getting back to where God meant man to have been when he walked with him in Eden, getting near to where God means we shall be when we shall see him face to face. Brethren, what must the unveiled vision be ! If the sight of him here be so sweet, what must it be to see him hereafter ! It may be we shall not live till he cometh, for the Master may tarry ; but if he doth not come, and we therefore are called to pass through the gate of death, we need not fear. I should not wonder if when we pass under the veil and come out in the disembodied state, one of our astonishments will be to find Jesus himself there waiting to receive us. The soul hoped that a convoy of ministering angels would be near the bed and would escort it across the stream and up the mountains to the Celestial

City ; but no : instead thereof the spirit will be saluted by the Lord himself. Will it be amazed and cry : " It is he, e'en he, my best Beloved, Jesus himself ; he has come to meet me. Heaven might have been too great a surprise ; even my disembodied spirit might have swooned away, but it is he, the man Christ Jesus whom I trusted down below, and who was the dear companion of my dying hours. I have changed my place and state, but I have not changed my Friend nor changed my joy, for here he is ! " What a glance of love will that be which he will give to us and which we shall return to him. Shall we ever take our eyes away from him ? Shall we ever wish to do so ? Will not the poet's words be true,

" Millions of years my wondering eyes,
Shall o'er thy beauties rove ;
And endless ages I'll adore
The glories of thy love."

Within a week it may be our meeting with Jesus himself may take place ; perhaps within an hour. A poor girl lying in the hospital was told by the doctor or the nurse that she could only live another hour ; she waited patiently, and when there remained only one quarter of an hour more, she exclaimed : " One more quarter of an hour, and then—— " she could not say what, neither can I ; only Jesus himself hath said, " Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory." And as he has prayed, so shall it be, and so let it be. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Song of Solomon
iv. 16 ; v. ; vi. 1, 2.

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A GOSPEL SERMON TO OUTSIDERS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 19TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

Preached on a night when the Tabernacle was free to all comers, the regular congregation having vacated their seats.

“Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.”—Mark x. 49.

THESE open services, as most of you will judge, are intended to be purely evangelistic. No doubt a large number of believers are here, many of them well-established in the faith, who would like to hear a doctrine argued, a type interpreted, or an apocalyptic symbol unfolded, but really I cannot attend to you this evening. I feel something like Luther when preaching to a mixed assembly. He said, as nearly as I can remember, words to this effect, “I perceive in the church Dr. Justus Jonas and Melancthon, and other learned doctors. Now, if I preach to their edification what is to become of the rest? Therefore, by their leave, I shall forget that Dr. Jonas is here at all, and preach to the multitude.” So must I do at this good hour, asking those of you who are advanced in the divine life to unite your prayers with mine, which will continually ascend, that the word of the gospel may be blessed to the unconverted.

Dear friends, there are so many of you that have been for years listening to the proclamation of the gospel, borderers, almost in Emmanuel's land, but not quite—that I feel most earnest that this night should be the time of your decision for the Saviour—that you should not remain any longer hearers only, but should become believers forthwith, and afterwards doers of the word. There are gentlemen in England who can afford to drive a coach and four from town to town and carry nobody, performing their journeys for their own amusement; but I am not able or willing to do anything of that kind. Unless I can have my coach loaded with passengers to heaven I would sooner it was

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never started, and had rather my team stopped in the stable. We must carry some souls to heaven, for our call is from above, and our time is too precious to throw away on mere pretence of doing good. We cannot play at preaching : we preach for eternity. We cannot feel satisfied merely to deliver sermons to senseless throngs, or to the most attentive crowds. Whatever smiles may greet us as we start, and whatever salutation may welcome us at our close, we are not content unless Jesus works salvation by us. Our desire is that grace should be magnified, and that sinners should be saved. They used to jeer at the Tabernacle in Moorfields, and the one in Tottenham Court Road, and call them Mr. Whitfield's soul traps. A very excellent name for a place of worship ; such may this Tabernacle ever be ! It ought to be a soul trap, and we shall be disappointed, indeed, if there are not some souls taken in the trap to-night. If God does not bless the word and make it so potent that some of you shall really close in with the gospel proclamation, and enter into eternal life, I shall be heavy of heart.

Before I attempt to deal with my text, let me describe to you the plan of salvation. You know it, the most of you. Oh that we could get at the thousands of London that do not know it, the multitudes that never enter a house of prayer or yield attention to the gospel message. Our heart yearns over them : but what more can we do for them ? They are perishing in wilful ignorance. Thanks be to God that so many are here to-night ; I will seize the opportunity to declare the plan of grace. Though so many of you know it, let us tell it to you again. By sin, by unrighteousness, by violation of God's law, we have broken our peace with God. We are lost, for he must punish sin. It is not possible that he should be the righteous governor of the universe and allow sin to go unpunished. To punish sin is no arbitrary purpose of an angry God. It is inevitable in the universe that where there is evil there should be suffering. If not in this life yet in another life, which will shortly succeed that which now is, every transgression must receive its meet recompense of reward. The question is, how can we be forgiven ? How, consistently with divine justice, can our iniquities be blotted out ? This is not an abstruse problem left for us to work out ; God's way of peace is made clear by revelation. God, in his infallible word, has told us the means and appliances by which guilty sinners can be made righteous before him ; and, instead of being driven from his presence at the last, may be accepted and dwell at his right hand. He tells us that, inasmuch as the first sin that ruined us was not ours, but Adam's, and by the transgression of one man we all fell, so it became possible for him, in consistency with justice, to ordain that another man should be forthcoming in whom we may rise, and be restored. That other man has come—"the second Adam, the Lord from heaven." But the task of lifting up was much harder than that of casting down. A mere man could ruin us, but a mere man could not redeem and rescue us. Therefore, God himself, the ever blessed, clothed himself with the nature of man, was born of a woman, lay in Bethlehem's manger, lived here on earth a life of humiliation and self-denial, and at the last took upon himself the sins of men in one vast load. Even as the fabled Atlas was said to carry the world upon his shoulders, so he took sin and guilt upon

him and bore it in his own body on the tree. On the cross Jesus hung as the substitute for all of our race that ever will believe on him, and there and then he put away by his suffering all the transgression and iniquity of believing men, so that now we can preach to mankind and say, "He that believeth in him is not condemned. He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life." When you go to a foreign city for the first time and stay at an inn, it may be that you miss your way when you go out, and are not able to get back again as easily as you wish; it is generally expedient, therefore, for travellers to learn the main streets of every town which they visit. In Rome we come to know which way the Corso runs, and when we get an idea of the run of that main thoroughfare we by-and-by are able to pick our way through the city. Now, the main street of the gospel is *substitution*. "He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The main street of the gospel runs crosswise; follow it, and you will know the ins and outs of the other great streets before long. This is the High Street of the City of Grace—"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Christ stood in our stead, and suffered that we might not suffer. He "died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Whosoever believes in Christ is saved from the damning power of sin and delivered from the wrath to come. Take this fact in all its breadth and length, and never doubt it, and you have the key of the gospel. Whosoever, I say, trusts his soul with the Lord Jesus Christ, relying on that sacrifice which he offered, and that death which he endured, is saved. Let him not doubt it. He has God's word for it; let him believe it and rejoice in it. "Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned," for, "like as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so has the Son of man been lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Simple, child-like reliance upon the Lord Jesus gives immediate and complete salvation to the trustful soul.

Well that is the main street of the city. Now how to get into it is the question; and I earnestly desire, and devoutly hope, to be the means, if God will help me, of leading some thereto. May the Holy Ghost now bear witness with the truth, and make it the power of God unto salvation. Our text says, "Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee."

Our first point is that *some who are seeking Christ greatly want comforting*. Secondly, *their very best comfort lies in the fact that Jesus calls them*. But, thirdly, *if they take the comfort of that call, it urges them to immediate action—"Arise."* "Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee."

I. First, then, MANY PERSONS WHO ARE REALLY SEEKING THE SAVIOUR GREATLY WANT COMFORTING.

I know there are many such here to-night. You long after everlasting life. God has wrought in you a desire to be reconciled to himself; but you need encouraging, for *you labour under a sort of undefined fear that these good things are not for you*. Partly your conscience, partly your unbelief, and partly Satan—these three have joined together to throw a mist over you, and you really think that you cannot be forgiven. You would not like to put it into exactly those words, but such is the

tenor of your thoughts. There is a hazy idea about you that there are many very good saintly people who will be saved; and, indeed, that there are some great transgressors who will be saved; but you do not think that *you* can be. Oh that I could destroy that unbelieving thought! There is salvation, there is mercy, there is forgiveness, and it is free to every soul that will come and take it. It is as free as the air you breathe, or as the water leaping from the street fountain yonder. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." You are mistaken in those gloomy reflections. You write bitter things against yourself, but God has not written them. What if you should take heart and get a hope, "Perhaps I may to-night find eternal life. Perhaps I may to-night go out of this house relieved of the burden of my sin." It were a good beginning if thou hadst such a hope, but thou mayest with confidence go a great deal further.

It may be that *you are cast down because you think that you have been seeking in vain*. You began to pray a few months ago, young man, and I am glad to hear of it; but you have not yet obtained peace. Do not give up praying. I know you are discouraged, but do not cease seeking. I myself was for many months an earnest seeker after God by the way of prayer. I thought that by importunate prayer I should find pardon. I did not understand that he had said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." So I set to work praying. Nevertheless, I am thankful that I did not cease from prayer, though it often seemed as if I wasted my words and spent my tears for nought. Be not discouraged. This blind man was not heard at first, though he cried earnestly. He had to cry for sight again and again, increasing in vehemence each time. Do not be driven to despair. There may be delays, but there shall never be denials to those who cry in earnest. Be of good comfort. Press on, dear heart, press on, and thou shalt find peace and comfort yet.

Perhaps, too, you are sad *because there are many round about you who discourage you*. They tell you there is nothing in religion. How should they know? Theirs is a strange infatuation. There are a great many individuals in the world who are considered to be honest in business: you would take their note of hand, you would trust their word about any goods they were selling, and yet when these good folks begin to say that they are conscious of a new life within them—that they have found out that God is real and spiritual, and that they have received a Spirit which dwells within them, or that they commune with God, straightway a number of people say that it is not true—in effect calling them liars. And why not true? On what ground are they to be discredited? Simply because the aforesaid people who deny it say that they never saw such a thing themselves and never felt such a thing themselves. But if there were a world full of blind people, and among them a few persons blessed with sight, whose eyes had been opened, if these began to talk of sunlight and colour, all the blind men might say, "It is not true." Why? "Because *we* never saw the sunlight or the colour." Does that prove that it is not true? Though *you* do not possess the faculties of vision, others do. If those men are honest in other things they have as much right to be believed in this thing as in the rest. We solemnly assert that there is something real in

religion. It is not a creed alone, it is a life. The regenerate belong to a new creation. If any man be in Christ he is a new creature with new faculties and new powers, so that he is introduced altogether into a new world. Do not believe those, then, who tell you that there is nothing in it, for they do not know, and therefore are not fair witnesses. They can witness to nothing but the fact that they are not in the secret. The man who was brought up for a murder which was sworn against him by six witnesses said that he ought not to be condemned, because he could bring sixty witnesses who did not see him do it. Of course he could; and so we can bring sixty thousand people to say there is no spiritual life because *they* have never felt it. What does that prove? It only proves that they know nothing about it. But if you bring a few—even though they should be but a few—straightforward, honest, simple-minded people whom you would believe in other things, you are bound to accept their testimony about this. There is something real in faith in Jesus. There is a peace which passeth all understanding obtained through pardoned sin. There is a new birth, for we have felt it; there is a new life, for we enjoy it. There is a joy that overleaps earth's narrow bounds: there is a rest of heart akin to the rest of the blessed in heaven, and it can be enjoyed here and now; thousands of us bear witness that it is so. Do not be discouraged then, for we tell you no old wives' fables, but the very truth which we have ourselves tasted and handled. You that are seeking after eternal life need not be baffled by sceptics; we are true men, and tell you what we have proved for ourselves. You will yet find it to be as God declares.

One reason why you have not obtained comfort is, perhaps, *because you do not know all the gospel yet*. Good news half told may often seem to be bad news. I have read that in the days of the semaphore signals a message came across to England concerning the Duke of Wellington, and half the message was read as it appeared upon the semaphore, and astonished all England with the sad intelligence. It ran thus, "Wellington defeated." Everybody was distressed as they read it, but it so happened that they had not seen all the message. Fog had intervened, and when, by-and-by, the air was clearer and the telegraph flashed out a second time, it was read thus—"Wellington defeated *the French*,"—quite another thing, quite the reverse indeed of what half the message had led men to fear. Thus when you hear half the gospel it may appear to condemn you; but you have only to hear the other half to find out its encouraging tidings. I would say, be diligent in hearing the gospel; be diligent in searching it out in the sacred book, which God has given to us; and when you know the truth more fully you will find faith come to you by the hearing and the understanding of the word of God. Leave those ministers who preach only a portion of the gospel, and try to know all the message of love, and you will, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, soon lose your fears.

Do you not think, too, that some seekers miss comfort because *they forget that Jesus Christ is alive*? The Christ of the Church of Rome is always seen in one of two positions—either as a babe in his mother's arms, or else as dead. That is Rome's Christ, but our Christ is alive. Jesus who rose has "left the dead no more to die." I was requested in Turin to

join with others in asking to see the shroud in which the Saviour was buried. I must confess that I had not faith enough to believe in the shroud, nor had I curiosity enough to wish to look at the fictitious linen. I would not care a penny for the article, even if I knew it to be genuine. Our Lord has left his shroud and sepulchre, and lives in heaven. To-night he so lives that a sigh of yours will reach him, a tear will find him, a desire in your heart will bring him to you. Only seek him as a loving, living Saviour, and put your trust in him as risen from the dead no more to die, and comfort will, I trust, come into your spirit.

Perhaps, too, you have a notion that conversion is something very terrible. A young woman came to me the other day, after a service, to ask me whether I really meant what I said when I declared that he that believed in Jesus Christ was saved there and then. "Yes," I said; and I gave her the scriptural warrant for it. "Why," she said, "my grandfather told me that when he found religion it took him six months, and they had nearly to put him into a lunatic asylum. He was in such a dreadful state of mind." "Well, well," I said, "that sometimes happens. But that distress of his did not save him. That was simply his conscience and Satan together keeping him away from Christ. When he was saved it was not by his deep feelings; it was by his believing in Jesus Christ." I then went on to set Christ before her as our sole ground of hope in opposition to inward feelings. "I see it," she said; and I rejoiced as I noticed the bright light that passed over her face, a flash of heavenly sunlight which I have often seen on the countenances of those who have believed in Jesus Christ, when peace fills the soul even to the brim, and lights up the countenance with a minor transfiguration. It is so. You have but to trust Christ, and it is done: but you are afraid. Have you never heard of the man who lost his way one night, and came to the edge of a precipice, as he thought, and fell over, and clutched at some old tree, and there hung, clinging to his frail support with all his might, for he felt that he should be dashed to pieces if he fell? There he hung till he got into a desperate state of fever, and his hands could hold up his body no longer; so at last he dropped and fell—about half-a-dozen inches—on to a smooth mossy bank, whereon he lay, altogether unhurt, and quite safe. Now, there are many who think that sure destruction must await them if they confess sin and resign all into the hands of God. It is an idle fear. Give up your hold upon everything but Christ, and drop down. Soft and mossy shall the bank be which receives you. Jesus Christ, by his love and by the efficacy of his precious blood, shall give you immediate rest and peace. Only drop now. Drop down at once: this is the major part of faith—the giving up of every other hold, and simply falling upon Christ. That dropping down will bring you present salvation.

II. Now, in the second place, the greatest comfort which I can very well conceive is that which is conveyed in the text. It is this—"BE OF GOOD COMFORT, RISE; HE CALLETH THEE"—a good word for the blind man, for he knew that Jesus did not call him to mock him, and that he did not say, "come hither" that he might merely tell him, "your eyes cannot be opened." Jesus did not call him to sport with him and send him away disappointed. Christ's calls are honest calls, and guarantee blessing to those who accept them.

Now, beloved friends, there are two calls mentioned in Scripture. The one is the *general call* of the gospel, and the other is the *effectual call*, the personal call, by which men are saved.

The general universal call ought to yield great comfort to any seeking soul. In the word of God, *you*, dear hearer, are called to come to Christ, even *you*. Why do I know that? Because when Jesus gave the commission to his disciples he said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." You are a creature, are you not? Well, then, you must be included in that range. We are to preach the gospel *to you*. And then again, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." You are a sinner, are you not? Do you not admit that? Very well, then, according to the text that faithful saying is to be addressed to you. And you, dear seeker, feel a burden upon your soul, do you not? You are labouring hard to get salvation. Therefore, the gospel call must be addressed to you. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Indeed there are many such calls, but there is another which must include you—"Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." Are you willing to come? then you are undoubtedly called to come to Christ. Should not that fact comfort you? because, as I have already said, he does not call you to mock you, or invite you to come without intending to bless you. Oh, hear his honest call, and pluck up courage and come to him. Nobody feels any trouble about going where there is a general invitation. Did you ever cross the Mont St. Bernard? If so, I do not suppose you wanted much pressing to turn into the hospice there and spend the night. When they came out and told you that everybody was welcome, rich and poor, and that travellers nearly all stayed there, you turned in. I went the other day to St. Cross Hospital, near Winchester, which some of you may know. There they give away a piece of bread to everybody who knocks at the door. I knocked as bold as brass. Why should I not? If they gave the bread away to everybody, why should not I have my piece? And so, of course, the hatch was opened, and I had my little piece of bread with the friends who were with me. It was a dole to be given to everybody that called. I did not humble myself particularly and make anything special of it; it was for all, and I came and received as one of the people who were willing to knock. Now, even so, if the gospel is to be preached to every creature, why stand you higgling and haggling when you want the bread of life? Why should you waste time in raising question after question when you only need to take what Jesus freely gives? I warrant you do not raise such quibbles against yourselves in money matters. If an estate is bequeathed you, you do not employ a solicitor to hunt for flaws in the title, or to invent objections to the will. Why do men raise difficulties against their own salvation, instead of cheerfully accepting what the infinite mercy of God so graciously provides for all who with broken hearts and willing minds are ready to take what God the ever-bountiful is so pleased to give.

The invitation is so large, and there is this to be noted concerning it. *No one was ever refused yet.* There is a well-known institution in London which bears across the front of it, "No destitute boy ever refused." Well may we put this over Christ's great house of mercy—

"No destitute soul ever refused." I can imagine two boys standing on the pavement in front of Dr. Barnardo's institution, and one saying to the other, "Can *we* go in there?" "Yes," says the other, "I should rather think we could. We are destitute, aren't we? Look here, my clothes are all in rags, and I have not a penny in the world, and no father and no mother. I slept under a dry arch last night. I am a destitute boy, and no mistake." I can only suppose that the other might boastfully say, "I ain't destitute; not I. I can earn my living any day, and I have got a half-crown in my pocket." Now, that fellow has no claim to be admitted, because he is not destitute; but the boy who is hungry and ragged and homeless is sure to be welcomed. As he reads those lines, "No destitute boy ever refused," he says, "There is hope for me then." Now, then, destitute soul, Jesus Christ never refused one like you yet. If you have a store of merit of your own, if you believe you can be saved by your good works, you do not come under the head of "destitute." "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." But if you are stripped of all boasting, if you are brought to bankruptcy as to personal merit, if you have come down to absolute poverty as to any hope in yourself, then, as no destitute soul ever was rejected or ever shall be, come to Jesus at once! Come at once, I say. "Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee."

But, dear friends, I said that there was another and *an effectual call*. That call the Holy Spirit directs to individuals, and when it comes, it is not resisted, or if resisted for a while, it is ultimately yielded to, so that the man is constrained to come. O Holy Spirit, give that call to-night. There were two brothers fishing, and Jesus said to them, "Follow me." They threw down their nets and followed him. Matthew was sitting at the receipt of custom, with his pen behind his ear and his account books before him. Jesus said, "Follow me." Up Matthew rose, and followed him at once. That little fellow, the tax gatherer, had climbed up a tree because, being short of stature, he could not see over the heads of the crowd. While he was looking down from among the leafy branches, the Master stood at the bottom of the tree, and said, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide in thy house." Down came Zaccheus. How could he help it? The Spirit of God had given the effectual call, and Christ was in that man's house shortly after, and the man gave abundant evidence of a change of heart. Oh, may the eternal Spirit speak in that fashion to some here present, so that they may at once yield and follow Jesus Christ.

That call, wherever it comes, *casts a sweet softness over the soul*. The man cannot make it out, but he feels so differently from what he did before. The iron sinew of his neck is gone. The cold stone within his breast has melted into flesh. He listens to the gospel which once he despised. Listening, he thinks; and it is a grand matter to get a man to think about himself, his God, eternity, heaven, hell, the Redeemer. As he thinks, he sees his life in a different light. He perceives that there has been sin in it—very much more of sin than he ever thought could have been there; and, as he sees his sin, he mourns over it. He almost wishes that he had never been born rather than have transgressed as he has done. His heart softens down under the influence

of the law of God. He lays aside his proud boastings, and confesses that he is full of transgression and sin. Next to this thoughtfulness and repentance comes a little hope: he perceives that there is a salvation worth having, and he asks himself why he should not have it. Then comes faith: he perceives that Jesus is the Son of God, and he says to himself, "If he be divine he can save even me." He trusts, and, as he trusts, the darkness which enveloped him begins to disappear. He obtains a little light, and yet a little more, and at last he cries, "I do believe that Jesus died for me. I rest my soul in his pierced hands. I am forgiven—I am saved." That man has been called by the blessed Spirit.

It is very strange, too, how God calls some men. I have known it happen many times in this Tabernacle. I have been preaching and I have made a remark which has suited the case as well as if I had been that man's companion, or better. How was it? I will tell you. God had been at work on that man, and he led his servant to work to the same point. The Lord was by his providence tunnelling one side of the mountain of the man's indifference, and then he set me to work on the other side by guiding me in my thoughts so that I preached the gospel in a suitable manner. Just as when they made the Mont Cenis tunnel, one set of engineers were boring one way and one set the other way, and then they met in the heart of the great mass. A pious mother has been boring away at the mountain by her entreaties, or an earnest Christian teacher, or a wife or a sister has been at the same work. Perhaps sickness, like the diamond boring rod, has been piercing into the man, and then at last in this place the word of the Lord has exactly hit the case, so that the tunnel through the soul has been completed, and eternal salvation has been the result. Perhaps the chance words of this night are no chance words to some of you now present, but the very words of God sent straight to your soul. God grant that it may be so, and he shall have the praise. O eternal Spirit, thus let it be.

III. Now, lest I weary you, I am going to close with the third head, which is that THE COMFORT DRAWN FROM OUR CALLING SHOULD LEAD TO IMMEDIATE ACTION. "Be of good comfort, *rise*; he calleth thee."

That exhortation to rise means instant *decision*. You have been hesitating and hanging like the scales of a balance, trembling between heaven and hell. Which is it to be? May the Holy Spirit call you so that it shall be Christ, salvation, eternal life. I am not always sorry when men grow angry while hearing a sermon. The worst thing that can happen to me to-night is for you all to be satisfied. But when some people get very angry they will think, and thinking they will feel, and feeling they may turn unto God. Despite their anger they will come again. The hook is in the man's jaws. We shall have that fish. Let him draw out the line further and further, for it will hold him. Let him have play. We shall have him back again before long. Have the landing net ready! There is nothing better for some men than to have their antagonism to the gospel aroused for a time. The truth has come home to them. It is at work on them, and, before long, we trust the blessed work will be complete, and the soul will be saved. This is the point aimed at.

"Rise," says the text. That is, do not let it be any longer a question, "Shall it be?" or "Shall it not be?" but decide to-night—"It shall be. By the grace of God I will be a Christian. By the grace of God, if there is salvation to be had, I will have it." I do not ask you to come to that decision for the mere sake of making a resolve, which you will cordially adopt and then carelessly forget, but I do ask the grace of God to lead you to say with purpose of heart, "It shall be." Alas, very many of you come and go: you hear, and hear, without profit; for it ends in hearing and never ripens into decision. Too many of our regular hearers still remain unconverted though occasional hearers have been saved. When you take hold of a piece of india-rubber, you may make any impression that you like all over it, but after all it resumes its old shape. There are hosts of hearers of that kind: very impressible, but they quickly return to their old tastes and habits. But you meet with other people who seem to be hard as flint. I have observed some who have sat in the aisle biting their lips, who have never intended to believe the gospel, and yet with one blow of the Master's hammer their hearts have gone to shivers directly. Their armour of resistance and their mail of defiance have been broken through, and they have proved afterwards the heartiest and most earnest of Christian converts. That is an unfortunate impressibility which ends in indecision. Those who show this plastic character mean to be right, but they manage to remain in the wrong. They intend to go to heaven, but, alas, alas, little hope is there that they will ever reach the city of the blessed. The probabilities are against it: they have passed so many years in procrastination that their indecision has become chronic, and fetters them to their sins. After the many seasons in which fair leaves have disappointed the hope of sweet fruits, our despondency is, we fear, the herald of their despair. There seems so little probability that they will ever decide for God and for his Christ that we scarcely hope with trembling; nay, we rather tremble to hope. Would God it were not so.

Oh dear friends! I pray you listen to the text. "Be of good comfort. He calleth you. Rise." Rise to something more than decision: rise to *resolution*. You have all heard of the poor woman who could not get justice done her by the judge. She called on him a great many times, but he would not hearken to her. At length she made up her mind that he *should* attend to her; so she was present on the first court day, and as soon as the judge came in she rose and said, "My lord——" "Have I not told you not to trouble me?" "But, my lord," she cried again. "I tell you to sit down." She sits down, but before the court is up, she says, "Can't I have a hearing?" "I cannot attend to you now, my good woman." But, when the judge comes out of court to go home, there she is standing at the carriage window, saying, "When will you hear my case? There are my poor children starving." She goes to the house and knocks at untimely hours. "Who is it?" the judge asks; and they tell him, "It is that poor woman who wants her case to be heard." He bids them chase her from his gate. She goes home, sad but determined, and the next morning she is in court again. The unjust judge had commanded the ushers not to let her in, but she has entered somehow, and the first thing that is heard is that shrill

voice—"My lord, will you hear me?" At last he grows tired, and he says, "Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me I will avenge her." And he does avenge her. Though the just God bears no resemblance to an unjust judge, yet the widow's importunity that prevailed in the teeth of such unpromising surrounding may urge you to incessant prayer. Treat the great God with the importunity which Christ by so bold a simile counsels and commands. Say thus to yourself: "I cannot perish. I must perish if I do not have salvation; and therefore I will have it. I will die at the foot of the cross if die I must, but I will have it." It happened to me some few years ago to have to lecture at the City Hall, Glasgow. I went at the hour appointed to keep my engagement, and the Provost of Glasgow went to the hall with me, but the policeman said that he could not let us in, for we had no tickets, and his orders were to admit none without them. That was a pretty state of things. So the Lord Provost said, "But you must let us in." The policeman said that he could not, no matter who we were. I said, "This is the Lord Provost," but the policeman said he did not know that, neither did he care who he was: he should not let us pass against rules. He had received orders from the inspector to let nobody in, and he was sure no Lord Provost would wish him to disobey orders. Then the Lord Provost said, "But this is Mr. Spurgeon. He has got to deliver the lecture." "I cannot help that. I have my orders, and he shall not come in without a ticket." What do you think we did? Did we take "No" for an answer? Not so. We meant to get in. So we talked and parleyed and reasoned, but he, like a good policeman, did his duty, and would take no commands from us which were contrary to orders. There we stopped. At last he was condescending enough to let us send our cards in to his inspector, and straightway we were admitted. Now, if we had taken "No" for an answer, and had gone away, I should have had to this day the repute of having gathered the people together to disappoint them. No, I knew I had a right to go in, and I meant to get in, and I did get in. You must do the same. Even though your sin should proscribe you, and the law should denounce you, and the officer of justice should refuse you and say, "You cannot come in; no sinner comes this way," yet insist upon it that you are a creature and a sinner—that the gospel is sent to every creature, and specially invites sinners, and therefore you mean to go in to the feast of grace, whoever may oppose. Stand to it that you will enter, and as surely as God is true if there be this resolve, and perseverance in you, you shall enter into the banquet of love, you shall inherit eternal life, and rejoice for evermore.

But, dear friends, if you get to that decision and resolution, there is one thing more, and that is, *cast away everything that hinders you from finding salvation*. The poor blind man cast away his garment. Now, if you would be saved you must resolve in your soul, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, that every sin and every habit of yours which hinders your finding Christ at once shall be given up. There is no pleasure worth keeping at the price of your soul. No sin is worth preserving on any account whatever; let all your old pleasures and habits go; let them all go, and give yourself up to Jesus Christ. How I wish that many,

to-night, might be led to say, "There is salvation then for me by believing. I believe that the word of God is true, and I take Christ to be mine." Do give yourselves up wholly to Christ. No half measures; no hesitating and halting now. You know what Cortez did when he went to Mexico, and intended to conquer it. The soldiers that were with him were few and dispirited. The Mexicans were many, and the enterprise hazardous. The soldiers would have gone back to Spain, but Cortez took two or three chosen heroes with him, and went down to the seaside and broke up all the ships; and, "Now," he said, "we must conquer or die. We cannot go back." Burn your boats; get rid of all thoughts of return; leave sin, and abhor it. God help you to do so, for this is his gospel—"Repent and be converted, every one of you." Forsake sin and believe in Jesus Christ, and let the boats be burned, making this your resolution—that there shall be no going back to sin any more.

Thus have I told you what should be done, but God alone can make you do it. We can lead a horse to the water, but we cannot make him drink; so we can set the plan of salvation before men, but we cannot induce them to accept it, save only as, in answer to prayer, the eternal Spirit moves in the souls of men. He is moving upon you now. We are conscious that he is brooding over some of you at this hour. Resist him not. Yield yourselves wholly to his monitions. As the bulrushes in the stream bow their heads to the passing breeze, so bow before the motions of the ever blessed Spirit. May he help you so to do, for Jesus's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark x. 13—52.

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EJACULATORY PRAYER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 9TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"So I prayed to the God of heaven."—Nehemiah ii. 4.

As we have already seen in the reading of the Scripture, Nehemiah had made enquiry as to the state of the city of Jerusalem, and the tidings he heard caused him bitter grief. "Why should not my countenance be sad," he said, "when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" He could not endure that it should be a mere ruinous heap—that city which was once beautiful for situation and the joy of the whole earth. Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak to other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise; but it occurred to him that he would do something himself. This is just the way that practical men start a matter. The unpractical will plan, arrange, and speculate about what may be done, but the genuine, thorough-going lover of Zion puts this question to himself—"What can you do? Nehemiah, what can you do yourself? Come, it has to be done, and you are the man that is to do it—at least, to do your share. What can you do?" Coming so far, he resolved to set apart a time for prayer. He never had it off his mind for nearly four months. Day and night Jerusalem seemed written on his heart, as if the name were painted on his eyeballs. He could only see Jerusalem. When he slept he dreamed about Jerusalem. When he woke, the first thought was "Poor Jerusalem!" and before he fell asleep again his evening prayer was for the ruined walls of Jerusalem. The man of one thing, you know, is a terrible man; and when one single passion has absorbed the whole of his manhood something will be sure to come of it. Depend upon that. The desire of his heart will develop into some open demonstration, especially if he talks the matter over before God in prayer. Something did come of this. Before long Nehemiah had an opportunity. Men of God, if you want to serve God

and cannot find the propitious occasion, wait awhile in prayer and your opportunity will break on your path like a sunbeam. There was never a true and valiant heart that failed to find a fitting sphere somewhere or other in his service. Every diligent labourer is needed in some part of his vineyard. You may have to linger, you may seem as if you stood in the market idle, because the Master would not engage you, but wait there in prayer, and with your heart boiling over with a warm purpose, and your chance will come. The hour will need its man, and if you are ready, you, as a man, shall not be without your hour. God sent Nehemiah an opportunity. That opportunity came, 'tis true, in a way which he could not have expected. It came through his own sadness of heart. This matter preyed upon his mind till he began to look exceedingly unhappy. I cannot tell whether others remarked it, but the king whom he served, when he went into court with the royal goblet, noticed the distress on the cupbearer's countenance, and he said to him, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." Nehemiah little knew that his prayer was making the occasion for him. The prayer was registering itself upon his face. His fasting was making its marks upon his visage; and, though he did not know it, he was, in that way, preparing the opportunity for himself when he went in before the king. But you see when the opportunity did come there was trouble with it, for he says, "I was very sore afraid." You want to serve God, young man: you want to be at work. Perhaps you do not know what that work involves. It is not all pleasure. You are longing for the battle, young soldier: you have not smelt powder yet, but when you have been in a battle, and have had a few cuts, or a bullet or two have pierced you, you may not feel quite so eager for the fray. Yet the courageous man sets those things aside, and is ready to serve his country or his sovereign, and so the courageous Christian puts all difficulty aside, and he is ready to serve his comrades and his God, cost what it may. What if I should be sore afraid? yet so let it be, my God, if thus there shall be an opportunity to seek and to secure the welfare of Jerusalem for thy servant, who longs to promote it with all his heart.

Thus have we traced Nehemiah up to the particular point where our text concerns him. The king, Artaxerxes, having asked him why he was sad, he had an opportunity of telling him that the city of his fathers was a ruin. Thereupon the king asks him what he really wishes; by the manner of the question he would seem to imply an assurance that he means to help him. And here we are somewhat surprised to find that, instead of promptly answering the king—the answer is not given immediately—an incident occurs, a fact is related. Though he was a man who had lately given himself up to prayer and fasting, this little parenthesis occurs—"So I prayed to the God of heaven." My preamble leads up to this parenthesis. Upon this prayer I propose to preach. Three thoughts occur to me here, on each of which I intend to enlarge—the fact that *Nehemiah did pray just then; the manner of his prayer; and, the excellent kind of prayer he used.*

I. THE FACT THAT NEHEMIAH PRAYED CHALLENGES ATTENTION. He had been asked a question by his sovereign. The proper thing you would suppose was to answer it. Not so. Before he answered he prayed to the God of heaven. I do not suppose the king noticed the pause.

Probably the interval was not long enough to be noticed, but it was long enough for God to notice it—long enough for Nehemiah to have sought and have obtained guidance from God as to how to frame his answer to the king. Are you not surprised to find a man of God having time to pray to God between a question and an answer? Yet Nehemiah found that time. We are the more astonished at his praying, because he was so evidently perturbed in mind, for, according to the second verse, he was very sore afraid. When you are fluttered and put out you may forget to pray. Do you not, some of you, account it a valid excuse for omitting your ordinary devotion? At least, if anyone had said to you, "You did not pray when you were about that business," you would have replied, "How could I? There was a question that I was obliged to answer. I dared not hesitate. It was a king that asked it. I was in a state of confusion. I really was so distressed and terrified that I was not master of my own emotions. I hardly knew what I did. If I did not pray, surely the omission may be overlooked. I was in a state of wild alarm." Nehemiah, however, felt that if he was alarmed it was a reason for praying, not for forgetting to pray. So habitually was he in communion with God that as soon as he found himself in a dilemma he flew away to God, just as the dove would fly to hide herself in the clefts of the rock.

His prayer was the more remarkable on this occasion, because *he must have felt very eager about his object*. The king asks him what it is he wants, and his whole heart is set upon building up Jerusalem. Are not you surprised that he did not at once say, "O king, live for ever. I long to build up Jerusalem's walls. Give me all the help thou canst"? But no, eager as he was to pounce upon the desired object, he ~~withdraws~~ his hand until it is said, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." I confess I admire him. I desire also to imitate him. I would that every Christian's heart might have just that holy caution that did not permit him to make such haste as to find ill-speed. "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey." Certainly, when the desire of our heart is close before us, we are anxious to seize it; but we shall be all the surer of getting the bird we spy in the bush to be a bird we grasp in the hand if we quietly pause, lift up our heart and pray unto the God of heaven.

It is all the more surprising that he should have deliberately prayed just then, because *he had been already praying for the past three or four months* concerning the selfsame matter. Some of us would have said, "That is the thing I have been praying for; now all I have got to do is to take it and use it. Why pray any more? After all my midnight tears and daily cries, after setting myself apart by fasting to cry unto the God of heaven, after such an anxious conference, surely at last the answer has come. What is to be done but to take the good that God provides me with and rejoice in it?" But no, you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man to pray more. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." If you do but know the sweet art of prayer, you are the man that will be often engaged in it. If you are familiar with the mercy-seat you will constantly visit it.

"For who that knows the power of prayer
But wishes to be often there?"

Although Nehemiah had been praying all this while, he nevertheless must offer another petition. "So I prayed to the God of heaven."

One thing more is worth recollecting, namely, that *he was in a king's palace*, and in the palace of a heathen king too; and he was in the very act of handing up to the king the goblet of wine. He was fulfilling his part in the state festival, I doubt not, amongst the glare of lamps and the glitter of gold and silver, in the midst of princes and peers of the realm. Or even if it were a private festival with the king and queen only, yet still men generally feel so impressed on such occasions with the responsibility of their high position that they are apt to forget prayer. But this devout Israelite, at such a time and in such a place, when he stands at the king's foot to hold up to him the golden goblet, refrains from answering the king's question until first he has prayed to the God of heaven.

II. There is the fact, and I think it seems to prompt further enquiry. So we pass on to observe—THE MANNER OF THIS PRAYER.

Well, very briefly, it was what we call *ejaculatory prayer*—prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then it is done. It was not the prayer which stands knocking at mercy's door—knock, knock, knock; but it was the concentration of many knocks into one. It was begun and completed, as it were, with one stroke. This ejaculatory prayer I desire to commend to you as among the very best forms of prayer.

Notice, how *very short* it must have been. It was introduced—slipped in—sandwiched in—between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer; and, as I have already said, I do not suppose it took up any time at all that was appreciable—scarcely a second. Most likely the king never observed any kind of pause or hesitation, for Nehemiah was in such a state of alarm at the question that I am persuaded he did not allow any demur or vacillation to appear, but the prayer must have been offered like an electric flash, very rapidly indeed. In certain states of strong excitement it is wonderful how much the mind gets through in a short time. You may, perhaps, have dreamed, and your dream occupied, to your idea, an hour or two at the very least, yet it is probable—nay, I think certain—that all the dreaming is done at the moment you wake. You never dreamed at all when you were asleep: it was just in that instant when you woke that the whole of it went through your mind. As drowning men when rescued and recovered have been heard to say that while they were sinking they saw the whole panorama of their lives pass before them in a few seconds, so the mind must be capable of accomplishing much in a brief space of time. Thus the prayer was presented like the winking of an eye; it was done intuitively; yet done it was, and it proved to be a prayer that prevailed with God.

We know, also, that it must have been a *silent prayer*; and not merely silent as to sounds but silent as to any outward signs—perfectly secret. Artaxerxes never knew that Nehemiah prayed, though he stood probably within a yard of him. He did not even move his lips as Haunah did, nor did he deem it right even to close his eyes, but the prayer was strictly within himself offered unto God. In the innermost shrine of the temple—in the holy of holies of his own secret soul—there did he pray. Short and silent was the prayer. It was a prayer on the spot. He did not go to his chamber as Daniel did, and open the window. Daniel was right,

but this was a different occasion. Nehemiah could not have been permitted to retire from the palace just then. He did not even turn his face to the wall or seek a corner of the apartment. No, but there and then, with the cup in his hand, he prayed unto the God of heaven, and then answered the question of the king.

I have no doubt from the very wording of the text that it was *a very intense and direct prayer*. He says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." That was Nehemiah's favourite name for God—the God of heaven. He knew whom he was praying to. He did not draw a bow at a venture and shoot his prayers anyhow, but he prayed to the God of heaven—a right straight prayer to God for the thing he wanted; and his prayer sped, though it occupied less, perhaps, than a second of time.

It was a prayer of *a remarkable kind*. I know it was so, because Nehemiah never forgot that he did pray it. I have prayed hundreds of times, and thousands of times, and not recollected any minute particular afterwards either as to the occasion that prompted or the emotions that excited me; but there are one or two prayers in my life that I never can forget. I have not jotted them down in a diary, but I remember when I prayed, because the time was so special and the prayer was so intense, and the answer to it was so remarkable. Now, Nehemiah's prayer was never, never erased from his memory; and when these words of history were written down he wrote that down, "So I prayed to the God of heaven"—a little bit of a prayer pushed in edgeways between a question and an answer—a mere fragment of devotion, as it seemed, and yet so important that it is put down in an historical document as a part of the history of the restitution and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, and a link in the circumstances which led up to that event of the most important character. Nehemiah felt it to be so, and therefore he makes the record—"So I prayed to the God of heaven."

III. Now, beloved friends, I come, in the third place, to recommend to you THIS EXCELLENT STYLE OF PRAYING.

I shall speak to the children of God mainly, to you that have faith in God. I beg you often, nay, I would ask you always to use this method of ejaculatory prayer. And I would to God, also, that some here who have never prayed before would offer an ejaculation to the God of heaven before they leave this house—that a short but fervent petition, something like that of the publican in the temple, might go up from you—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

To deal with this matter practically, then, *it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to have set times of prayer*. I cannot understand a man's keeping up the vitality of godliness unless he regularly retires for prayer, morning and evening at the very least. Daniel prayed three times a day, and David says, "Seven times a day will I praise thee." It is good for your hearts, good for your memory, good for your moral consistency that you should hedge about certain portions of time and say, "These belong to God. I shall do business with God at such-and-such a time, and try to be as punctual to my hours with him as I should be if I made an engagement to meet a friend." When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor of London the banquet somewhat troubled him, for Sir Thomas always had prayer with his family at a certain time. The difficulty was how to quit

the banquet to keep up family devotion; but so important did he consider it that he vacated the chair, saying to a person near that he had a special engagement with a dear friend which he must keep. And he did keep it, and he returned again to his place, none of the company being the wiser, but he himself being all the better for observing his wonted habit of worship. Mrs. Rowe used to say that when her time came for prayer she would not give it up if the apostle Paul were preaching. Nay, she said, if all the twelve apostles were there, and could be heard at no other time, she would not absent herself from her closet when the set time came round. Well, I do not feel very sure that my scruples would go quite so far, for, I think, if I had the opportunity of hearing the apostle at the time when I am wont to pray, and could not at any other time hear him, I should postpone my prayer to hear the sermon, nor would there be any impropriety in the arrangement; probably it would show a little shrewd sense. Yet, as a general principle, it is desirable to be punctual and punctilious in respect to your private as well as your public devotions. Be not negligent, but vigilant; never remiss, but always regular in keeping up your appointed seasons of prayer.

But now, having urged the importance of such habitual piety, I want to impress on you the value of another sort of prayer; namely, *the short, brief, quick, frequent ejaculations* of which Nehemiah gives us a specimen. And I recommend this, because it hinders no engagement and occupies no time. You may be measuring off your calicoes, or weighing your groceries, or you may be casting up an account, and between the items you may say, "Lord, help me." You may breathe a prayer to heaven and say, "Lord, keep me." It will take no time. It is one great advantage to persons who are hard pressed in business that such prayers as these will not, in the slightest degree, incapacitate them from attending to the business they may have in hand. It requires you to go to no particular place. You can stand where you are, ride in a cab, walk along the streets, be the bottom sawyer in a saw pit, or the top one either, and yet pray just as well such prayers as these. No altar, no church, no so-called sacred place is needed, but wherever you are, just such a little prayer as that will reach the ear of God, and win a blessing. Such a prayer as that can be offered anywhere, under any circumstances. I do not know in what condition a man could be in which he might not offer some such prayer as that. On the land, or on the sea, in sickness or in health, amidst losses or gains, great reverses or good returns, still might he breathe his soul in short, quick sentences to God. The advantage of such a way of praying is that you can pray often and pray always. If you must prolong your prayer for a quarter of an hour you might possibly be unable to spare the time, but if it only wants the quarter of a minute, why, then, it may come again and again and again and again—a hundred times a day. The habit of prayer is blessed, but the spirit

of prayer is better; and the spirit of prayer it is which is the mother of these ejaculations; and therefore do I like them, because she is a plentiful mother. Many times in a day may we speak with the Lord our God.

Such prayer may be suggested by all sorts of surroundings. I recollect a poor man once paying me a compliment which I highly valued at the time. He was lying in a hospital, and when I called to see him he said, "I heard you for some years, and now whatever I look at seems to remind me of something or other that you said, and it comes back to me as fresh as when I first heard it." Well, now, he that knows how to pray ejaculatory prayers will find everything about him helping him to the sacred habit. Is it a beautiful landscape? Say, "Blessed be God who has strewn these treasures of form and colour through the world, to cheer the sight and gladden the heart." Are you in doleful darkness, and is it a foggy day? Say, "Lighten my darkness, O Lord." Are you in the midst of company? You will be reminded to pray, "Lord, keep the door of my lips." Are you quite alone? Then can you say, "Let me not be alone, but be thou with me, Father." The putting on of your clothes, the sitting at the breakfast table, the getting into the conveyance, the walking the streets, the opening of your ledger, the putting up of your shutters—everything may suggest such prayer as that which I am trying to describe if you be but in the right frame of mind for offering it.

These prayers are commendable, *because they are truly spiritual*. Wordy prayers may also be windy prayers. There is much of praying by book that has nothing whatever to recommend it. When you have found the benefit of a manual of French conversation to anyone travelling in France without a knowledge of the language, then try how much good a manual of prayers will do a poor soul who does not know how to ask our heavenly Father for a boon or benefit that he needs. *A manual*, a handbook, forsooth! Tush! Pray with your heart, not with your hands. Or, if you would lift hands in prayer, let them be your own hands, not another man's. The prayers that come leaping out of the soul—the gust of strong emotion, fervent desire, lively faith—these are the truly spiritual; and no prayers but spiritual prayers will God accept.

This kind of prayer is free from any suspicion that it is prompted by the corrupt motive of being offered to please men. They cannot say that the secret ejaculations of our soul are presented with any view to our own praise, for no man knows that we are praying at all; therefore do I commend such prayers to you, and hope that you may abound therein. There have been hypocrites that have prayed by the hour. I doubt not there are hypocrites as regular at their devotions as the angels are before the throne of God, and yet is there no life, no spirit, no acceptance in their pretentious homage; but he that ejaculates—whose heart talks

with God—he is no hypocrite. There is a reality, and force, and life about it. If I see sparks come out of a chimney I know there is a fire inside somewhere, and ejaculatory prayers are like the sparks that fly from a soul that is filled with burning coals of love to Jesus Christ.

Short, ejaculatory prayers are of great use to us, dear friends. Oftentimes they check us. Bad-tempered people, if you were always to pray just a little before you let angry expressions fly from your lips, why many times you would not say those naughty words at all. They advised a good woman to take a glass of water and hold some of it in her mouth five minutes before she scolded her husband. I dare say it was not a bad receipt, but if, instead of practising that little eccentricity, she would just breathe a short prayer to God, it would certainly be more effectual, and far more scriptural. I can recommend it as a valuable prescription for the hasty and the peevish; for all who are quick to take offence and slow to forgive insult or injury. When in business you are about to close in with an offer about the propriety of which you have a little doubt, or a positive scruple, such a prayer as “Guide me, good Lord” would often keep you back from doing what you will afterwards regret.

The habit of offering these brief prayers would also check your confidence in yourself. It would show your dependence upon God. It would keep you from getting worldly. It would be like sweet perfume burnt in the chamber of your soul to keep away the fever of the world from your heart. I can strongly recommend these short, sweet, blessed prayers. May the Holy Ghost give them to you!

Besides, they *actually bring us blessings from heaven*. Ejaculatory prayers, as in the case of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, as in the case of Jacob when he said even in dying, “I have waited for thy salvation, O God,”—prayers such as Moses offered when we do not read that he prayed at all, and yet God said to him, Why cryest thou unto me; ejaculations such as David frequently presented, these were all successful with the Most High. Therefore abound in them, for God loves to encourage and to answer them.

I might thus keep on recommending ejaculatory prayer, but I will say one more thing in its favour. I believe it is very suitable to some persons of a peculiar temperament who could not pray for a long time to save their lives. Their minds are rapid and quick. Well, dear friends, time is not an element in the business, God does not hear us because of the length of our prayer, but because of the sincerity of it. Prayer is not to be measured by the yard, nor weighed by the pound. It is the might and force of it—the truth and reality of it—the energy and the intensity of it. You that are either of so little a mind or of so quick a mind that you cannot use many words, or continue long to think of one thing, it should be to your comfort that ejaculatory prayers are

acceptable. And it may be, dear friend, that you are in a condition of body in which you cannot pray any other way. A headache such as some people are frequently affected with the major part of their lives—a state of body which the physician can explain to you—might prevent the mind from concentrating itself long upon one subject. Then it is refreshing to be able again and again and again—fifty or a hundred times a day—to address one's self to God in short, quick sentences, the soul being all on fire. This is a blessed style of praying.

Now, I shall conclude by just mentioning a few of the times *when* I think we ought to resort to this practice of ejaculatory prayer. Mr. Rowland Hill was a remarkable man for the depth of his piety, but when I asked at Wotton-under-Edge for his study, though I rather pressed the question, I did not obtain a satisfactory reply. At length the good minister said, “The fact is, we never found any. Mr. Hill used to study in the garden, in the parlour, in the bed-room, in the streets, in the woods, anywhere.” “But where did he retire for prayer?” They said they supposed it was in his chamber, but that he was always praying—that it did not matter where he was, the good old man was always praying. It seemed as if his whole life, though he spent it in the midst of his fellow-men doing good, was passed in perpetual prayer. You know the story of his being over there in Walworth at Mr. George Clayton's chapel, where our brother Paul Turquand now is the pastor, and of his being seen in the aisles after everybody was gone, while he was waiting for his coachman. There was the old man toddling up and down the aisles, and as some one listened, he heard him singing to himself—

“And when I shall die, receive me I'll cry,
For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why;
But this thing I find, we two are so joined,
He won't be in heaven and leave me behind.”

And with such rhymes and ditties, and choice words, he would occupy every moment of his life. He has been known to stand in the Black-friars' road, with his hands under his coat tails, looking in a shop window, and if you listened you might soon perceive that he was breathing out his soul before God. He had got into a constant state of prayer. I believe it is the best condition in which a man can be—praying always, praying without ceasing, always drawing near to God with these ejaculations.

But if I must give you a selection of suitable times I should mention such as these. Whenever you have a great joy, cry, “Lord, make this a real blessing to me.” Do not exclaim with others, “Am I not a lucky fellow?” but say, “Lord, give me more grace, and more gratitude, now that thou dost multiply thy favours.” When you have got any arduous undertaking on hand or a heavy piece of business, do not touch it till you have breathed

your soul out in a short prayer. When you have a difficulty before you, and you are seriously perplexed, when business has got into a tangle or a confusion which you cannot unravel or arrange, breathe a prayer. It need not occupy a minute, but it is wonderful how many snarls come loose after just a word of prayer. Are the children particularly troublesome to you, good woman? Do you seem as if your patience was almost worn out with the worry and harass? Now for an ejaculatory prayer. You will manage them all the better, and you will bear with their naughty tempers all the more quietly. At any rate your own mind will be the less ruffled. Do you think that there is a temptation before you? Do you begin to suspect that somebody is plotting against you? Now for a prayer, "Lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies." Are you at work at the bench, or in a shop, or a warehouse, where lewd conversation and shameful blasphemies assail your ears? Now for a short prayer. Have you noticed some sin that grieves you? Let it move you to prayer. These things ought to remind you to pray. I believe the devil would not let people swear so much if Christian people always prayed every time they heard an oath. He would then see it did not pay. Their blasphemies might somewhat be hushed if they provoked us to supplication. Do you feel your own heart going off the lines? Does sin begin to fascinate you? Now for a prayer—a warm, earnest, passionate cry, "Lord, hold thou me up." Did you see something with your eye, and did that eye infect your heart? Do you feel as if "your feet were almost gone, and your steps had well nigh slipped"? Now for a prayer—"Hold me, Lord, by my right hand." Has something quite unlooked for happened? Has a friend treated you badly? Then like David say, "Lord, put to nought the counsel of Abithophel." Breathe a prayer now. Are you anxious to do some good? Be sure to have a prayer over it. Do you mean to speak to that young man as he goes out of the Tabernacle to-night about his soul? Pray first, brother. Do you mean to address yourself to the members of your class and write them a letter this week about their spiritual welfare? Pray over every line, brother. It is always good to have praying going on while you are talking about Christ. I always find I can preach the better if I can pray while I am preaching. And the mind is very remarkable in its activities. It can be praying while it is studying: it can be looking up to God while it is talking to man; and there can be one hand held up to receive supplies from God while the other hand is dealing out the same supplies which he is pleased to give. Pray as long as you live. Pray when you are in great pain; the sharper the pang then the more urgent and importunate should your cry to God be. And when the shadow of death gathers round you, and strange feelings flush or chill you, and plainly tell that you near the journey's end, then pray. Oh! that is a time for ejaculation. Short and pithy

prayers like this: "Hide not thy face from me, O Lord"; or this, "Be not far from me, O God"; will doubtless suit you. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," were the thrilling words of Stephen in his extremity; and "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," were the words that your Master himself uttered just before he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. You may well take up the same strain and imitate him.

These thoughts and counsels are so exclusively addressed to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that you will be prone to ask, "Is not there anything to be said to the unconverted?" Well, whatever has been spoken in their hearing may be used by them for their own benefit. But let me address myself to you, my dear friends, as pointedly as I can. Though you are not saved, yet you must not say, "I cannot pray." Why, if prayer is thus simple, what excuse can you have for neglecting it? It wants no measureable space of time. Such prayers as these God will hear, and ye have all of you the ability and opportunity to think and to express them, if you have only that elementary faith in God which believes "that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Cornelius had, I suppose, got about as far as this, when he was admonished by the angel to send for Peter, who preached to him peace by Jesus Christ to the conversion of his soul. Is there such a strange being in the Tabernacle to-night as a man or woman that never prays? How shall I expostulate with you? May I steal a passage from a living poet who, though he has contributed nothing to our hymn books, hums a note so suited to my purpose, and so pleasant to my ear that I like to quote it—

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain, flowing night and day:
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

I do not suspect there is a creature here who never prays, because people generally pray to somebody or other. The man that never prays to God such prayers as he ought, prays to God such prayers as he ought not. It is an awful thing when a man asks God to damn him; and yet there are persons that do that. Suppose he were to hear you; he is a prayer-hearing God. If I address one profane swearer here I would like to put this matter clearly to him. Were the Almighty to hear you. If your eyes were blinded and your tongue were struck dumb while you were uttering a wild imprecation, how would you bear the sudden judgment on your impious speech? If some of those prayers of yours were answered for

yourself, and some that you have offered in your passion for your wife and for your child, were fulfilled to their hurt and your distraction, what an awful thing it would be. Well, God does answer prayer, and one of these days he may answer your prayers to your shame and everlasting confusion. Would not it be well now, before you leave your seat, to pray, "Lord have mercy upon me; Lord, save me; Lord, change my heart; Lord, give me to believe in Christ; Lord, give me now an interest in the precious blood of Jesus; Lord, save me now"? Will not each one of you breathe such a prayer as that? May the Holy Spirit lead you so to do, and if you once begin to pray aright I am not afraid that you will ever leave off, for there is a something that holds the soul fast in real prayer. Sham prayers—what is the good of them? But real heart pleading—the soul talking with God—when it once begins will never cease. You will have to pray till you exchange prayer for praise, and go from the mercy-seat below to the throne of God above.

May God bless you all; all of you, I say; all who are my kindred in Christ, and all for whose salvation I yearn. God bless you all and every one, for our dear Redeemer's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Nehemiah i. ii. 1—8.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—181, 636, 978.

END OF VOLUME XXIII.

BRITISH EQUITABLE

ASSURANCE COMPANY.

OFFICE—4, QUEEN STREET PLACE, LONDON, E.C.

Particulars of the Investment of the Accumulated Fund, as per Balance Sheet, January 31st, 1876:.

	£	s.	d.
Mortgages on property within the United Kingdom	126,740	19	7
Ground rents	174,174	2	7
British Government Securities	4,609	7	6
Indian and Colonial Government Securities	49,917	8	9
Foreign Government do. (United States Debt)	26,162	8	1
Railway and other debentures and debenture stocks	—	—	—
Do. do. shares (preference and ordinary)	9,110	9	8
House property	7,384	2	8
Loans upon personal security	—	—	—
Agents' Balances	90,091	14	11
Loans on the Company's Policies	13,311	10	1
Cash—			
On deposit...	£14,005 13 10		
In hand and on current account	3,211 4 4		
	17,216	18	2
Loans to clerks	173	4	8
Furniture, Fittings, &c.	1,000	0	0
Deduct—			
Depreciation Fund	£449,892	6	8
Other sums owing by the Company—	£5,000 14 10		
Sundry Persons	626 3 5		
Claims admitted but not paid (not being due)	4,423 0 0		
	10,049	18	9
	£439,842	7	5

EXTRACTS FROM NOTICES OF THE PRESS.

"Having a considerable knowledge of the actual position of the Company, we feel great confidence in commending it to our young men readers, to whom a policy in a good Office ought to be an essential possession."—*Christian World*, June 23rd, 1876.

"Year by year the Directors of the 'British Equitable' are in the happy position of having to report a large accession of new business. Mr. Gover's speech at the 21st annual meeting was in many respects a remarkable disquisition. It is not always that an Office occupying a position that is somewhat *uni generis* can stand the many tests which the Managing Director applied to the 'British Equitable.' He proved it in every vital part, and it is not too much to say that it proved perfectly invulnerable to the touch of his Ithuriel spear."—*Insurance Record*, June 30th, 1876.

"This vigorously-thriving Company presents a report which may well gladden the hearts of its shareholders, policyholders, and friends. The 'British Equitable' has from the first secured a high place in the public estimation from the evident business tact and energy with which it is managed."—*Baptist*, June 2nd, 1876.

"The 'British Equitable' is distinguished above most companies in the painstaking which its Managing Director always displays in his annual statement of affairs. That statement is never a routine document, but rather an intelligent survey of the position, designed to make even the most casual observer familiar with the progress and position of the Company."—*Commercial World*, June 1st, 1876.

"The report of the Directors shows truly, as stated therein,

that the twin features of the twenty-first year have been growth and consolidation."—*Metropolitan*, June 3rd, 1876.

"The Institution has attained its majority, and the members of the family may be counted by thousands. The figures prove the power and stability of the Company."—*Investor's Guardian*, June 3rd, 1876.

"The houses throughout have been handsome and steady; a fact, of course, in a great measure attributable to the low scale of mortality consequent on the care taken in admitting lives—a short—to the soundness of the business transacted, thus contributing to the security and advantage of every member."—*Railway Record*, June 17th, 1876.

"The figures are exceedingly satisfactory, and denote good and healthy progress."—*Reporter*, June 21st, 1876.

"Here is a shining example of those societies which have caught the spirit of the age, not content to rest upon their established reputation; they have inspired their individual members with the life and spirit that have distinguished their organisation from the day of formation. Individuals in great numbers have taken up the watch-cry of 'One-get-one.' This is admirable."—*Joint Stock Companies Journal*, June 24th, 1876.

"The report which has just been issued of this highly successful Company furnishes matter for grave consideration, more especially by the youthful and rising portion of the community. The Company has reached its twenty-first year, and has been uniformly growing and consolidating up to the present time."—*Christian Globe*, June 30, 1876.

Mutual Entrants in 1876 participate in the Eighth Division of Profits.

INFLUENTIAL AGENTS WANTED.

N.B.—No payment made to any agent or other person will be deemed a payment made to or for the Company unless the party making such payment obtain a receipt, signed by the Manager or Sub-Manager for it.

BRITISH EQUITABLE ASSURANCE COMPANY.

OFFICE—4, QUEEN STREET PLACE, LONDON, E.C.

Directors.

WILLIAM MACDONALD BASDEN, Esq.,
Great Saint Helen's, City and Lloyds.
GEORGE THOMAS DALE, Esq., Bayswater.
WILLIAM SUTTON GOVER, Esq., 4 Queen
Street Place, City.
JOHN MIDDLETON HARE, Esq., Sydenham.

FOUNTAIN JOHN HARTLEY, Esq., Ald
Street, City (Hon. Sec. Sunday School Union).
WILLIAM GEORGE LEMON, Esq., Lincoln's Inn.
WILLIAM SMITH, Esq., Upper Norwood.
EDWARD BEAN UNDERHILL, Esq., L.L.D.,
Hampstead (Hon. Sec. Baptist Missionary Society).

Managing Director & Actuary.

WILLIAM SUTTON GOVER, Esq., F.S.S., F.I.A.

Sub-Manager.

JOHN WILKINSON FAIREY, Esq.

Auditors.

ALFRED HENRY BAYNES, Esq., Putney (Secretary Baptist Missionary Society).
JAMES CLARKE, Esq., Fleet Street, City (Proprietor and Editor *Christian World*).
HENRY GOULD SHARP, Esq., Tuppbridge Wells.

TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL REPORT (MAY, 1876).

2,154 Policies issued for	£438,700
New Annual Income	£13,054
21,151 Policies in force for	£3,724,432
Annual Premium Income	£116,753
305 Death Claims, Matured Policies and Bonuses	£54,959
From commencement paid for Claims...	£350,628
Laid by in the Year	£39,567
Amount of Accumulated Fund	£439,842

Table showing Specimens of Profits on Policies 21 years in force :—

Age.	Sum.	Total Premiums Paid.	Bonus.	Secured at Death.	Bonus, being per Cent. of Premium.
	£	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	
21	1,000	408 19 6	262 10 0	1,262 10 0	64.18
30	500	275 1 6	131 5 0	631 5 0	51.05
25	100	45 3 0	26 5 0	126 5 0	58.00

AVERAGE REVERSIONARY BONUS FOR 21 YEARS, 1½ PER CENT, PER ANNUM.

Mutual Assurance without Mutual Liability.

Policies Payable in Lifetime.

Non-Forfeiture Policies by Limited Payments.

SEPARATE USE POLICIES.

Under the provisions of "The Married Women's Property Act, 1870," the Company issues Policies for the separate use and benefit of Married Women on the lives of their husbands.

These Policies do not form part of the husband's personal estate, and are, therefore, secured to their intended use from the claims of his creditors, should he afterwards become insolvent.

Similar Policies are issued on the lives of Married Women (when the husband is already assured), and in either case the wife has entire control over the money secured to her by the Policy.

BRITISH EQUITABLE ASSURANCE COMPANY.

4, QUEEN STREET PLACE, E.C.

AT THE TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, held on May 24th, 1877, at the Office of the Company, 4, Queen Street Place, E.C., FOUNTAIN JOHN HARTLEY, Esq., the Chairman of the Company (Honorary Secretary of the Sunday School Union), presiding,

The Managing Director, WILLIAM SUTTON GOVER, Esq. (Member of the London School Board—Deputy Governor of the Honourable Irish Society), read the following

REPORT.

THE TWENTY-SECOND YEAR'S BUSINESS of the Company presents satisfactory results, accomplished in face of a general depression of trade.

2,348 new Policies have been issued assuring £449,410, yielding a New Annual Premium Income of £12,950.

The Policies in force at the end of the year were 22,594, assuring £4,014,886, and yielding an Annual Premium Income of £124,810.

The amount of Death Claims admitted, Matured Policies, and Bonuses, has been £41,869.

From the commencement of the Company £389,411 have been paid for Claims and Bonuses under Policies.

£60,255 have been added to the Accumulated Fund, which is thus raised to £500,097.

The amount laid by in the year does not contain either purchase-money for annuities or single premiums.

The Investments and re-investments of the year, exclusive of investments in the Public Funds, have been as follows :—

Freehold Ground Rents	...	...	...	...	£70,859
Mortgages	...	...	...	...	17,400
Loans on Policies, &c.	...	...	...	...	4,805
Total	...	...	...	...	<u>£93,124</u>

The average rate of interest on the Investments of the year being £4. 13s. 10d. per cent.

The amount paid for Surrenders was £2,171—less than 1½ per cent. on premiums received.

The Accounts and Securities have been thoroughly examined by the Auditors.

The thanks of the Board are presented to the Policyholders for their invaluable aid in extending the Company's business.

The Managing Director, WILLIAM SUTTON GOVER, Esq., then addressed the Meeting as follows :—

LAST YEAR, for the Twenty-first time, I had the pleasant task, at the "COMING OF AGE" of the BRITISH EQUITABLE ASSURANCE COMPANY, of presenting my Twenty-first exposition of the affairs of the Company, and my seventh Valuation of its assets and liabilities, and on that occasion our seventh Division of Profits was declared, which had averaged a Reversionary Bonus of *One and a quarter per cent. per annum* on the amounts assured during the whole duration of the Company.

That Report and Division of Profits gave universal satisfaction to our Policyholders and Shareholders, and notwithstanding an unexampled stagnation of trade has contributed in no small degree in enabling me this day to present to you, at our Twenty-second Anniversary—which I do with thankfulness—an account of by far the most successful year the Company has ever had.

For six years each year's New Business has been larger than the preceding.

Year.	No. of Policies.	Amount Assured.
17	1,934	£320,319
18	2,190	380,050
19	2,307	406,630
20	2,352	420,570
21	2,154	436,700
22	2,348	449,410
6	13,285	£2,413,679

As 22,594 Policies Assuring £4,014,886 were in force at end of Twenty-second year, it will be seen that about three-fifths of all Policies in force have been taken out in the last six years, and are fresh from selection. They are also on young lives.

WASTE AND REPARATION.					No. of Policies.	Amount of Policies.	Annual Premiums.
At the end of our TWENTY-FIRST YEAR we had IN FORCE					21,151	£ 3,724,432	£ 116,753
WASTE.	No. of Policies	Amount of Policies.	Annual Pre-miums.	Amount Received thereon.			
The year's waste of business has been—		£	£	£			
By Death	225	37,981	1,444	15,291	..	..	..
Surrender	117	24,350	726	5,667	..	..	..
Discontinued	563	96,625	2,722	6,526	..	..	..
Total	905	158,956	4,892	27,484	905	158,956	4,892
Thus reducing the Business that was in force at the end of the Twenty-first year to					20,246	3,565,476	111,861
The New Business of the Twenty-second year has increased those figures by					2,348	449,410	12,950
Making the Business in force at the end of the TWENTY-SECOND YEAR					22,594	£4,014,886	£124,811

This process of waste and reparation goes on in every Life Assurance Company every year of its existence.

It renders it necessary that New Business in adequate amount should be obtained yearly, and the profit on a portion of the waste goes far towards paying the cost of its obtainal.

We see that 905 Policies which had been some years in force have been extinguished, and that more than one-tenth of the Business in force at the end of the Twenty-second year has been taken out during that year, and is fresh from selection.

Thus a large proportion of new blood has been transfused into the Society, and the rate of mortality is prevented from so rapidly increasing as would otherwise be the case.

It is worthy of remark that the proportion of waste this year has been less than in any former year.

The New Business is larger than in any of the preceding five years—an incidental proof, not only of the efficiency of our agents, but likewise of the just confidence placed by the Policyholders in the character of the Directors; their conviction that the Company is in a sound, prosperous, and satisfactory condition; and their knowledge that its affairs are administered with the design of benefitting the Policyholders to the utmost. But it shows more than this, viz., the active and influential exertions of the Policyholders to induce others to assure in the Company, and their ready sympathy with the agents whom they promptly and unceasingly help in their important work.

The "One-get-one" plan has never been carried out by any Life Office with the same systematic organization and successful results as in the "British Equitable."

The confidence of the Policyholders is more particularly shown by the small number

of Policies surrendered. Out of 21,151 Policies in force at the end of the Twenty-first year, 117 only have been surrendered to the Company. There was paid for these surrendered Policies £2,171, or about $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. upon the premiums received in the year—the smallest percentage we have had for many years.

We had at risk, we have seen, 21,151 Policies, assuring £3,724,432, at the commencement of the year, and the number of deaths has been 225, or a little over 1 per cent., and the amount paid for Death Claims and Bonuses has been £41,869 or $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the amount at risk, or $34\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the premiums received in the Twenty-second year. A continuous low mortality—almost unexampled—has characterized the Company from the commencement, and shows how carefully our large Business has been selected; the influence of our large New Business in keeping down the death rate, the character and habits tending to longevity of the classes from whom we obtain our Assurances: and to myself, who, from the commencement, have gone over the life cases of the Company, and recommended to the Board, on the data of facts and professional opinions before me, the disposition of every case, it yields unalloyed personal satisfaction.

There are few Life Offices who have so many lives assured as the "British Equitable," notwithstanding its comparative youth: and the average amount per Policy is smaller than in most Companies, and this, in some particulars, places us at a disadvantage, as being, in some sense, intermediate between an ordinary Life Office and what is called an Industrial Office. This, of course, increases both the expenses of the searching examination and investigation of each new Policy we feel it necessary to make, and also the working expenses of Policies already in force; but our experience shows that this disadvantage is more than compensated by a lower continuous rate of mortality, and that the benefits and profits to the Policyholders are not inferior to those in Offices less exceptionally situated.

While on this question of expenses, I will observe that they are about $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. less on the premium income than they were six years ago, and that, seeing the Company has now a fine large Business in force, built up in Twenty-two years, and exceeding £4,000,000, the Directors have wisely determined to discontinue—save in exceptional cases—the services of our esteemed Lecturer—Jabez Inwards—whose services to the Company have been invaluable, placing him on a retiring pension, with which he is entirely satisfied; and they have also determined on other measures which, while it is believed they will not decrease the ratio of New Business of the Company, will materially lessen the cost of its obtaining, so that a gradual but effective reduction of percentage of expenses to premiums will in future take place.

In reference to our expenses during the past year, it must be observed that, as New Business costs much more in the first year than afterwards, the large proportion of New Business to Business previously in force, has greatly tended to increase the ratio of expenses; and, paradoxical as it may appear, it is really the case that, if we had been less successful in obtaining New Business, we should have appeared more prosperous if viewed from the expense standpoint only. It is, however, not fair to consider the expenses of a Company solely. It is more equitable to take the claims and expenses together, and to see what proportion they bear to the premiums received, and here, as our claims added to our expenses only amount to 62 per cent. of the premiums received, we stand so low that only six Offices in the Kingdom are lower, of which six the ages of the Companies are 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 14 years.

In our Twenty-second year we received from premiums £120,737, the premium income from Policies in force at the end of the year was £124,811, a larger sum; but, as a large proportion of our premiums are paid quarterly, we do not get a full year's income in the year from our New Business, and when the New Business is in excess of the prior year's New Business, which has been the case for the last six years, it, to a small extent, increases the apparent percentage of expenses.

We have also received in interest £19,318, making our year's revenue £140,055.

At our Twenty-first Annual Meeting, by reference to our printed report, I note that I said, "The revenue in our Twenty-first year was £131,000 or £9,000 in excess of the preceding year, and I estimate the revenue for our Twenty-second year at not less than £140,000." It has actually exceeded that sum by £55. I also said, "Our Accumulated Fund, at the moment I am speaking, amounts to about £450,000, while it is highly probable that at our Twenty-second Annual Meeting it will amount to Half-a-Million sterling."

My calculation was this. At the end of the Twenty-first Financial Year we had laid by £439,842, and, making allowance for the period of a year between that date and the Annual Meeting, we must have laid by enough to bring it up to £450,000, and, estimating the Twenty-second year's savings at £50,000, we should have Half-a-Million by the date of the Twenty-second Annual Meeting.

We have really accumulated that amount by the end of the Twenty-second year—three

months earlier than I expected—so that my anticipations have been more than fully realized.

The Twenty-third year will have an increase of revenue. First—from the interest yielded by the £60,000 laid by and profitably invested this year, and Secondly—from an increase in the premium income, from the growth of the Company's Business, and I think our revenue will not be less than £150,000 for the year, while we may hope to make a considerable advance in our Accumulated Fund.

Our Accumulated Fund at the end of the Twenty-first year amounted to £439,842, and we have laid by in the year—after all payments for Death Claims and Bonuses, Surrenders and expenses—£60,255, making the Accumulated Fund, at the end of the Twenty-second year, £500,097. This sum, laid by, is equal to about half the premiums received in the year, or, if we consider the sum laid by over and above the interest received in the year, £40,937, is about 34 per cent. on the premiums received. Now I remark that only four Offices have laid by so much beyond interest and annuity receipts during the past year as we have, and one only has laid by so large a percentage of the premiums, besides the interest and excluding purchase moneys, as we have done.

Accumulated Funds of Offices at end of their Twenty-second year of age:—

Name of Office.	Accumulated Fund.	Of which laid by in year.
Scottish Equitable	£763,871	...
Star	647,030	£56,784
Equity and Law	544,651	£47,317
British Equitable	500,097	£60,255
English and Scottish Law	492,841	...
British Empire	409,121	...
Marine and General	283,238	£16,021
General	261,000	...
Lancashire	254,972	£13,452
Mutual	244,000	...
Provident Clerks	197,400	£27,714
Provincial	193,624	...
Reliance	125,264	...

I have not been able to find the Accumulated Funds of any other Offices at their Twenty-second year, nor could I ascertain the amounts laid by in the year except in the six cases quoted above.

Our Investments during the year have amounted to £93,124.

£70,859 in Freehold Ground Rents

17,400 on Common Mortgage

4,865 Loans on Policies, etc.

£93,124

So that nearly one-fifth of our Accumulated Fund has been invested during the last year on excellent securities and yielding interest at the rate of £4. 13s. 10d. per cent. per annum.

The year's purchases increase the amount of Freehold Ground Rents to nearly one-half of the Accumulated Fund, and considering that these have been well purchased—that many have Reversions attached to them—that the value is set down at cost price only, and considering also the high price this class of securities is now fetching, I think it probable that they would realize between £30,000 and £40,000 more than they stand at in our Balance Sheet, so that you see we have not overstated our wealth.

I have thus endeavoured to give you a bird's-eye view of the position of our Company, and shall now make an all-round comparison of the British Equitable Assurance Company with all other Offices.

I shall do this under two heads, the one having reference to the actual state of the Company, the other to the governing principles which render this Company unlike all others. And I shall quote for my purposes both from the Government Returns furnished by the Offices, and from the "A B C Assurance Guide."

I may premise that this Company has never been amalgamated with any other, or bought the Business of any other Company. It follows, that every life assured in this Office has been examined by its medical staff and accepted by the Directors on what they have deemed sufficient proof of its quality.

I find by the "A B C Guide" that out of 92 Companies there enumerated, 28 are amalgamated Offices.

Nor does this Company carry on the hazardous businesses of Fire Assurance or Marine Assurance, deeming that safety imperatively requires that a Life Office should transact Life Assurance only, whereas it appears that 36 Companies carry on one or other of these businesses.

Nor does the Company transact Foreign or Colonial Life Assurance. It confines itself to English Life Assurance. Many Offices transact Life Assurance all over the world, which to my mind renders their English Life Assurances less safe than they otherwise would be.

Nor does this Company adopt the common practice of issuing half-credit Policies, or lend money on personal security, as many Life Offices do, to the peril, as I think, of their Policyholders.

This Company has had the great advantage, moreover, of having been founded since the Government has issued the English Life Table, based on data so extensive that no other Life Table can be compared to it, and which, being deduced from observations of the experience of a population under normal conditions, is the truest of all Tables for the purposes of Life Assurance, and will, I think, eventually supersede all others.

This Office has been guarded by that Table from a great danger, which has either been experienced or come very near to by Offices adopting the rates of the Northampton Table of mortality, which, giving an untrue representation of the longevity likely to be experienced by older lives, has led to the assurance of those lives at rates virtually inadequate to the risk. Of course Offices which adopted these rates have been flooded with older lives, and although they have afterwards abandoned the "Northampton" and adopted the Carlisle rates, it has not been until they have granted assurances for—in some cases—millions of money, upon the "Northampton" inadequate rates. These Offices are marked by a continuous excessive rate of mortality, which will be seen by comparing them with other Offices of their own ages.

This evil has been rendered greater, because, seeing business come in so fast and not suspecting they were selling Life Assurance at the older ages under cost price, they have, it is to be feared, been lax in their investigations of the fitness for assurance of the lives proposed, by which several large bodies of inferior lives have been assured. Thus, while dwelling in a fool's paradise, they have incurred two of the greatest dangers that Life Assurance Offices could bring upon themselves. Our rates are calculated on the English Life Table, and our periodical Valuations are by the same Table of mortality.

Although valuing temperance as one of the greatest safeguards of life, and scrutinizing the habits of life in this respect of all applicants for assurance with jealous care, we have considered it would be inexpedient either to confine Life Assurance to total abstainers or to have a separate section devoted to temperance lives, as, unfortunately, many total abstainers fall into intemperate habits—passing from one extreme sometimes to the other. These would have to be draughted off yearly from a temperance section to a general section, and although in such a case there would be a great difference in the rate of death claims between the two sections, it would be mainly through the unjust importation of so many back-sliders yearly into the general section. The practice of this Office is not to make any invidious distinction, and to assure none but really temperate lives—not, of course, confining that title to total abstainers.

With these preliminary observations I remark there are 16 Companies younger and 73 older, 2 Offices being of the same age with our own.

13 Companies have in force less than 1,000 Policies

26	"	"	over 1,000 and under 5,000 Policies
28	"	"	" 5,000 " 10,000 "
12	"	"	" 10,000 " 20,000 "
8	"	"	" 20,000 and upwards.

We are in the "8," having the largest number of Policies, and 4 Companies only not being Industrial Companies have a larger number of Policies than we have. It may be wondered why we have so large a body of policyholders; in fact, many times as numerous as those of many Offices. The reason is, that long before Mr. Gladstone advised those who wished to succeed, to go to the masses of the people for their supporters, we *did* it; neglecting the hackneyed and well-beaten preserves of Life Assurance, we went into the uncultivated regions and harvested our Policies by thousands.

Looking at the AMOUNT OF ASSURANCES IN FORCE, we have upwards of Four Millions assured.

19 Companies have less than 1 Million in Force.

10	"	more than ...	1 and less than 2 Millions in Force
12	"	" ...	2 " 3 "
13	"	" ...	3 " 4 "
34	"	" ...	4 Millions

Considering the PREMIUM INCOME we have an income of over £124,000.

11 Companies have a Premium Income less than ... £10,000

17 " " " " between ... £10,000 and £50,000

25 " " " " ... £50,000 ,, £124,000

36 have a Premium Income exceeding ours.

Considering the progress made by THE INCREASE OF PREMIUMS RECEIVED IN THE YEAR OVER THE PRECEDING YEAR, our increase was £8,710.

In the case of 32 Offices there was a Decrease.

In 37 other Companies, where there was an increase, it was smaller than in our own. And our increase has been exceeded by 21 Offices only. It is curious to note that there are 7 Companies whose total Premium Income is less than our net increase over the previous year.

In the AVERAGE AMOUNT ASSURED PER POLICY, we stand lower than all the Offices, with six exceptions.

Our ACCUMULATED FUND EXCEEDS HALF-A-MILLION, AND IT WAS INCREASED IN THE TWENTY-SECOND YEAR BY £60,255.

22 Offices have a smaller, and 58 a larger Accumulated Fund than the "British Equitable."

In 17 Companies the Accumulated Fund has DECREASED in the last year. In 52 other Companies the INCREASE ON THE YEAR HAS BEEN LESS THAN OUR OWN, and only 22 Companies have laid by more, in the year, than we have.

I come now to amounts paid for Death-claims and Bonuses.

62 Companies have paid LARGER amounts; 29 Companies have paid SMALLER amounts. OUR RATIO OF DEATH-CLAIMS, &c., TO PREMIUMS IS SMALLER THAN IN ANY OTHER COMPANY—WITH SIX EXCEPTIONS—of which the ages are 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 14 years.

11 Offices, more recently established than our own, have A MUCH LARGER RATIO OF MORTALITY. TAKING THE PER CENTAGE OF DEATH-CLAIMS AND EXPENSES ADDED TOGETHER, ONLY 5 OFFICES ARE BELOW US, AND OF THESE 5, 4 ARE YOUNGER COMPANIES.

Out of 92 Offices, only 41 HAVE LAID BY, BESIDES INTEREST AND PRICE OF ANNUITIES, ANYTHING OUT OF PREMIUMS RECEIVED, and out of the 41, only 4 HAVE LAID BY MORE, OUT OF PREMIUMS RECEIVED, than the "BRITISH EQUITABLE."

34 Offices indeed—many of whom boast of their low expenses—have laid by LESS THAN they HAVE RECEIVED FOR INTEREST AND PRICE OF ANNUITIES, and in 17 cases the Accumulated Fund HAS LARGELY DECREASED.

As to NEW BUSINESS. The number of new Policies issued by our Company has been exceeded in three Companies only, while the AMOUNT OF OUR NEW POLICIES is exceeded in only 14 Offices, and the NEW ANNUAL PREMIUMS by 21 Companies only.

There is no essential particular in the position of a Life Office that is omitted in this Lird's-eye comparison of the "British Equitable" with other Offices.

In this brief survey I have avoided the designation of any particular Office by name or otherwise, and the comparison is to my own mind most satisfactory.

The marvellous growth and prosperous state of the Company are really the outgrowth of the policy inaugurated at its foundation and steadfastly pursued ever since.

The Company is unique in this respect, that it is based on the important principle of "Mutual Assurance, without Mutual Liability," and its rates on the English Life Table. It depends for its Business on the masses of the people whom it educates in Life Assurance. It strives by the origination and adoption, from time to time, of sound and valuable improvements in the practice of Life Assurance, to render it as beneficial as possible to the Policyholders. Hence—among other features—Policies made payable in life time by the application of the profits to this purpose, and Separate use Policies. It cultivates a spirit of brotherhood among the Policyholders. And finally it enlists their invaluable aid by the "ONE-GET-ONE" plan, so that every Policyholder may become a perennial source of Business to the Company.

The CHAIRMAN: It now becomes my duty to move the adoption of the Report and Balance-sheet, and I must say that every year as I rise to perform this duty I do it with increasing pleasure and ever-growing confidence. There are one or two personal matters I must refer to in the first instance, and one is the absence of our good friend Mr. GEORGE THOMAS DALE, the Vice-Chairman, who has been connected with the Company ever since its formation. He has been suffering from a bronchial attack, which has confined him to his house. I saw him yesterday, and he wished to be kindly remembered to his brother Directors and Shareholders, and I am glad to hope that in the course of a week or two he will be with us again. Another personal matter which I must mention is the very satisfactory circumstance that my friend Dr. UNDER-

BILL has received, within a very recent period, a testimonial, richly deserved by twenty-seven years of faithful service, from the Baptist Missionary Society. There are two or three things in the Report which I should like to refer to by way of emphasizing them. The satisfactory amount of new business—2,348 Policies for £449,410, being an increase on the past year. This is not a small matter. It involved a large amount of labour on the part of the Agents, the Board, and every member of the staff of the Company. Then there is another thing not less important. The small number of death claims—£41,869, or 34 per cent. of the premium income—and the small amount of waste by surrendered and discontinued policies, testifies to the growth of confidence in the Company. Another, and not the least important, item is the satisfactory addition of £60,000 to the Accumulated Fund, bringing it up to the very respectable figure of a little above Half-a-Million. The growth of that fund has been very satisfactory. It is just double what it was five years ago, and five years ago it had just doubled what it was five years previously. I am quite sure everything in the present state of things shows that there is a growing amount of confidence in the Company which we may fairly rejoice in, which we think the Company has fairly earned, and which I have no doubt will tell in the future to the increase of its business. Not only is there a very ample proportion of the future premiums reserved to meet every contingency likely to arise, but we have in hand between 50 and 60 per cent. of the premiums received on all policies in force.

Mr. JOHN MIDDLETON HARE: In the temporary absence of our valued friend **Mr. DALE**, I second the motion, and beg leave to express my entire concurrence with everything that has fallen from the **CHAIRMAN**.

Mr. JAMES CLARKE—Auditor—(Proprietor and Editor of the *Christian World*): I am very glad to be able once more to bear my emphatic testimony to the admirable manner in which the accounts of the Company are kept, and in which all the books, vouchers, and deeds were presented to the Auditors for their inspection. I need hardly say that the attention of the Auditors was especially directed to the Securities of the Company and we are abundantly satisfied that the funds are very wisely and securely invested.

Mr. ALFRED HENRY BAYNES—Auditor—(Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society): I am glad of an opportunity of confirming everything that **Mr. CLARKE** has said. I am here to testify my perfect and entire satisfaction with the way in which all the business, as represented by the books, has been conducted. I should like to say how very orderly we found everything, and how very ready we found the Staff to assist us in every conceivable way. Personally, I am very glad indeed to be connected with a Company that has been so ably managed, and that has, so far as my judgment goes, a very fine future before it.

The Resolution was then put to the meeting, and carried unanimously.

The Directors retiring by rotation—**Mr. GEORGE THOMAS DALE** and **Mr. WILLIAM MACDONALD BASDEN** were re-elected.

The Auditor retiring by rotation—**Mr. JAMES CLARKE**, was re-elected.

Mr. JOHN MIDDLETON HARE proposed, **Mr. W. R. SIMMONS**, of Manchester, seconded, and **Mr. TUTTLE**, of Norwich, supported the motion: "That in view of the Report presented to-day, and recollecting the luminous and comprehensive address which he has given us, the thanks of the Shareholders are most eminently due to the Managing Director for his past efforts, and for the ability which he manifests on all occasions in meeting every exigency and emergency as it arises," which was carried by acclamation.

The **Rev. SAMUEL DUNN** moved, and **Mr. JABEZ INWARDS** seconded the following resolution: "That the cordial thanks of the Shareholders are due and are hereby presented to the different Officers by whose faithful, diligent efforts the Company continues to be promoted and advanced. To the Solicitor—**Mr. HENRY GOVER**—who besides his directly professional services regularly attends the Sittings of the Board of Directors, thereby contributing both legal and practical assistance in numerous cases as they arise, and facilitating the prompt as well as the prudent dispatch of business. To the Medical Officers—the exercise of whose skill and care cannot be dissociated from the low rate of mortality which has happily marked the past year. To the Sub-Manager—**Mr. FAIRLEY**—whose intelligent assiduity and watchful attention over the business of his office have greatly contributed to the regularity and punctuality of its transaction, and to the Agents of the Company, who together with the Departmental Staff have extended and maintained its interests in the respective spheres of their constant enterprise or steady activity."

The Proceedings closed with a vote of thanks to the Chairman, moved by **Mr. DUFFORD**, and seconded by **Mr. BAUGH**, of Birmingham.

N.B.—No payment made to any Agent or other person will be deemed a payment made to or for the Company, unless the party making such payment obtain a receipt, signed by the Manager or Sub-Manager, for the same.

(400,000-6-77.)

BRITISH EQUITABLE ASSURANCE COMPANY.

CAPITAL—A QUARTER OF A MILLION.

OFFICE—4, QUEEN STREET PLACE, LONDON, E.C.

Directors.

WILLIAM MACDONALD BASDEN, Esq., Great Saint Helen's, and Lloyd's.
 GEORGE THOMAS DALE, Esq., Bayswater.
 WILLIAM SUTTON GOVER, Esq., 4, Queen Street Place (Member of the London School Board—Deputy-Governor of the Honorable Irish Society).
 JOHN MIDDLETON HARE, Esq., Sydenham.
 FOUNTAIN JOHN HARTLEY, Esq., Adde Street, (Hon. Sec.—Sunday School Union).
 WILLIAM GEORGE LEMON, Esq., Lincoln's Inn.
 WILLIAM SMITH, Esq., Upper Norwood.
 EDWARD BEAN UNDERHILL, Esq., LL.D., Hampstead (Hon. Sec.—Baptist Missionary Society).

Solicitor.

HENRY GOVER, Esq., 40, King William Street, E.C. (Member of the London School Board).

Bankers.

LONDON AND WESTMINSTER BANK, Lothbury.

Managing Director & Actuary.

WILLIAM SUTTON GOVER, Esq., F.S.S., F.I.A.

Sub-Manager.

JOHN WILKINSON FAIREY, Esq.

Auditors.

ALFRED HENRY BAYNES, Esq., Putney (Secretary—Baptist Missionary Society).
 JAMES CLARKE, Esq., Fleet Street, City (Proprietor and Editor "*Christian World*").
 HENRY GOULD SHARP, Esq., Tunbridge Wells.

Particulars of the Investment of the Accumulated Fund, as per Balance Sheet, January 31st, 1877:—

	£	s	d
Mortgages on property within the United Kingdom	129,506	8	11
Ground Rents (£237,367 Freehold)	244,181	11	6
British Government Securities	4,609	7	6
Indian and Colonial Government Securities	52,380	10	5
Foreign Government do. (United States Debt)	16,752	14	2
Railway and other debentures and debenture stocks	—	—	—
Do. do. shares (preference and ordinary)	9,110	2	8
House property	6,859	6	8
Loans upon personal security	—	—	—
Agents' Balances	25,095	11	11
Loans on the Company's Policies	15,211	10	10
Cash—			
On deposit	£2,200	0	0
In hand and on current account	3,500	2	7
Loans to clerks	5,700	2	7
Due from sundry persons	98	1	7
Furniture, Fittings, &c.	248	6	0
	1,000	0	0
Deduct—			
Claims admitted but not paid (not due at date of account)	£5,616	13	10
Depreciation Fund	5,130	8	8
	10,747	2	4
	£500,097	2	10

Particulars of Eighteen Hundred Death Claims paid by the Company may be obtained of the Agents.

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CONTENTS.

- No. 1,331.—THE TWO "COMES."
 1,332.—OUR URGENT NEED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
 1,333.—"REST IN THE LORD."
 1,334.—COMING—ALWAYS COMING.
 1,335.—A CHEERY WORD IN TROUBLOUS TIMES.

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OBSERVE.—It is not ESSENTIAL for any to have a personal interview, though in some cases an advantage. Those who do not should send a statement of their cases, in full, by letter (see questions for that purpose, page 32 of Mr. Congreve's Treatise).

New Cases—First Published, January, 1877.

Case of Consumption (Advanced Stage) in Cornwall.

On the 6th May I received a letter from Mr. W. H. R——, of B——, Cornwall, with reference to his brother's case—a young man 24 years of age, "the only hope of a widowed mother." He had had pleurisy in the previous September, from which there was a partial recovery. Present illness from three to four weeks, but for nine weeks entirely laid by; expectoration purulent, and half-a-pint in twenty-four hours; spasmodic breathing; secretions unnatural; loss of flesh and strength. At this time his own doctor's report was that "he could not recover, he must die." I sent medicine with letter of advice, &c. In three weeks the patient felt "stronger, and cough a little easier." In another fortnight, "still more improved, and expectoration less, and appetite improved." After this, in consequence of being accidentally without medicine for a few days, the patient somewhat relapsed, but, at the end of July he had again so progressed as to get down to breakfast every day. "All our friends," writes the brother, "are surprised. His own medical attendant called yesterday, and expressed himself surprised and pleased." In August he reported himself as feeling "fit for work." And so, improvement in all symptoms continued until October 5th, when I received the following letter:—"Very Dear Sir,—I take great pleasure in saying my brother has resumed his work. I attribute his recovering to you, under the blessing of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being. Yours gratefully, W. H. R."

Extract from a letter of Rev. R. Bax, St. Neot's.

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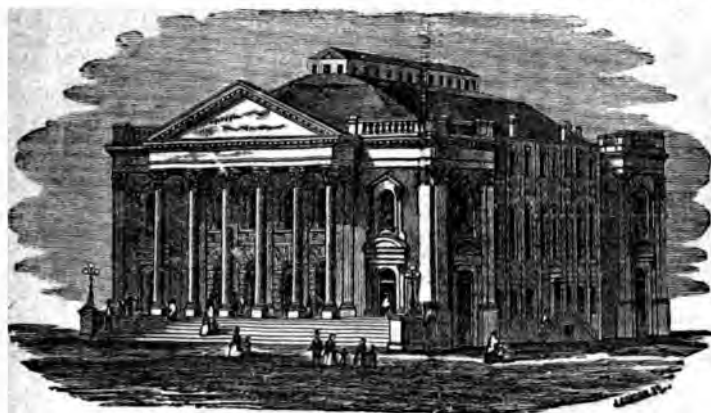
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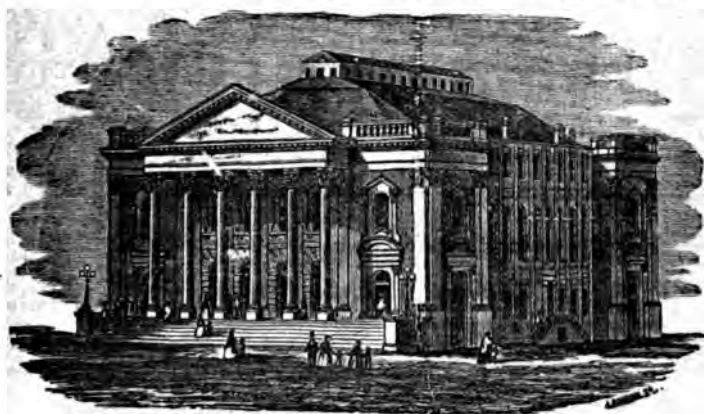
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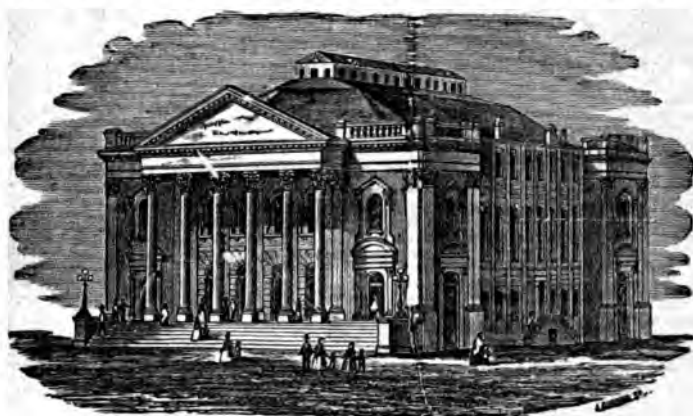
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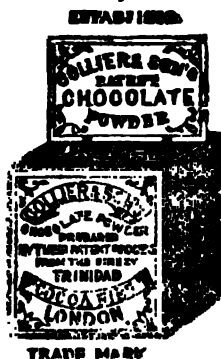
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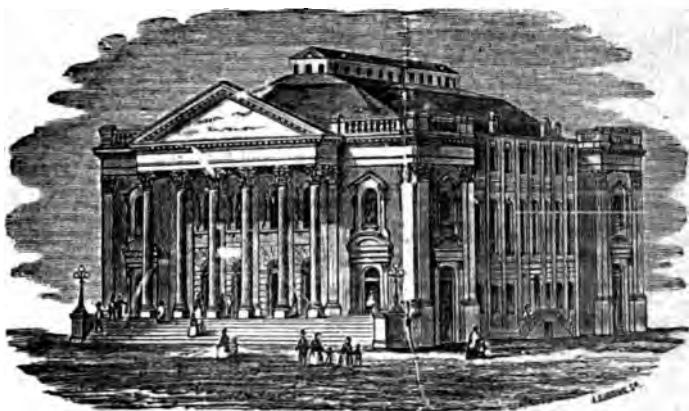
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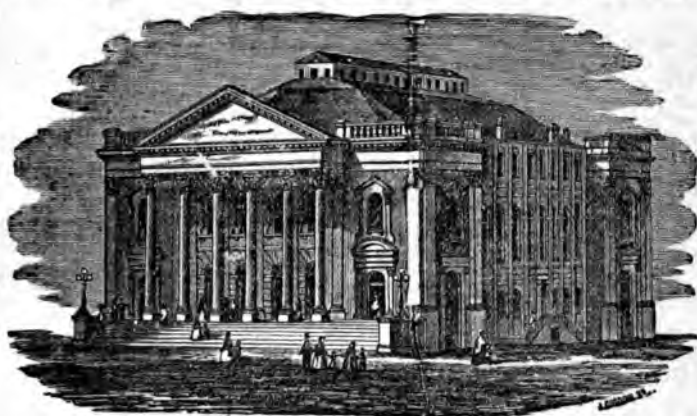
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